

# 人類は衰退しました

未確認生物スペシャル

田中ロミオ

イラスト / 戸部 淑



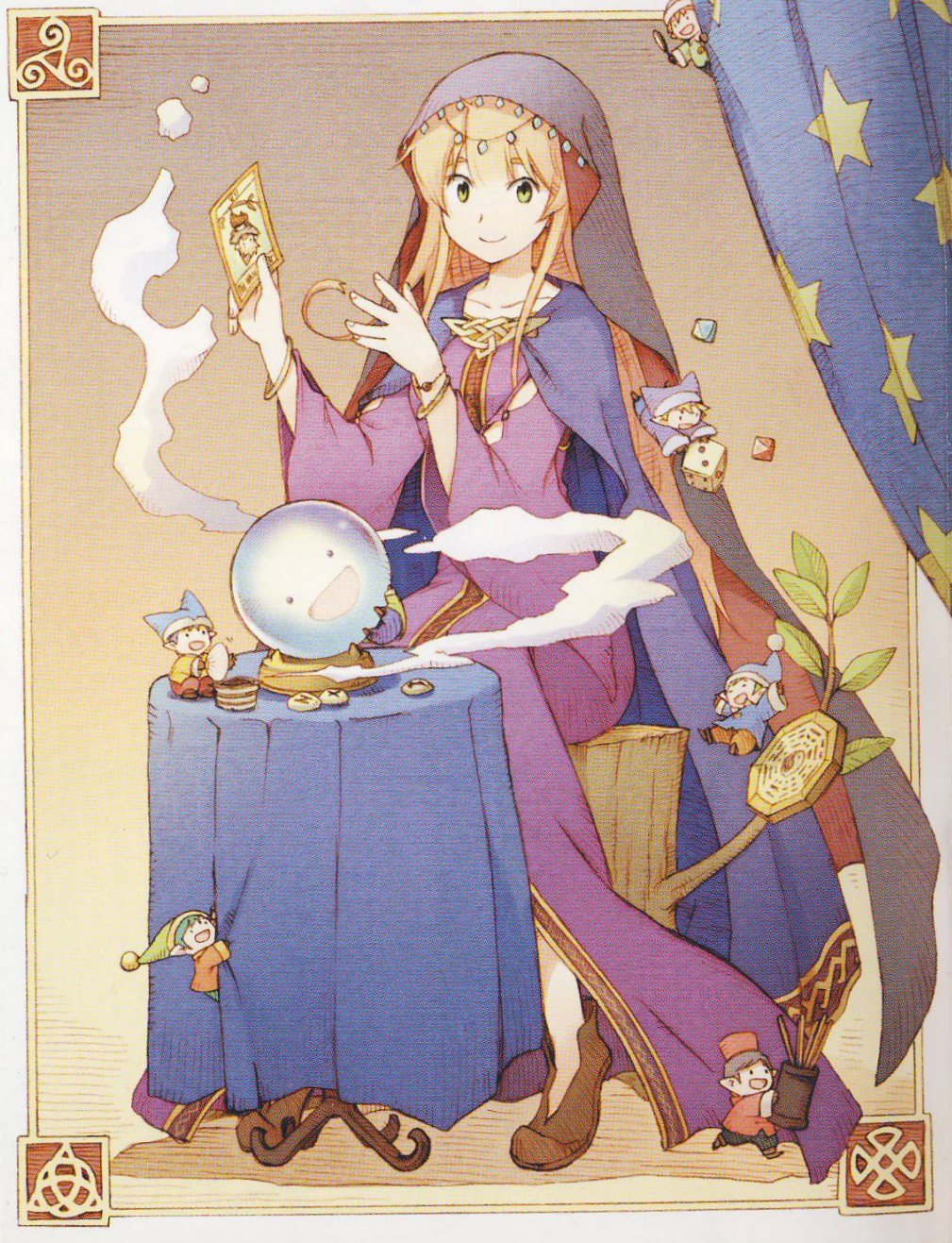
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デザイン／一尾成臣











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### MAIN CHARACTER S 主 要 キ ャ ラ ク タ ー

**Protagonist (Watashi, "I")** Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. Fairies at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Assistant-san** a youth who works as assistant to the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village, Y a girl the same age as Protagonist. Slender of face and physique, an attractive silver-haired lady. **K** an UN agent dressed in black clothes. **Curly Hair** A girl who went to the same school as the Protagonist. She's attached the older girl and calls her 'onee-san'.



*From the back cover:*

**Humanity Has declined - Unconfirmed Species Special**

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. Exactly, fairies are beings that are confirmed to exist. So what exactly would an 'unconfirmed species' or cryptid be...? Trolls, Future Men, Zombies, Mandragoras... an insatiable hunger for study, that is what drives human evolution forwards. And as its witness, what I have seen, well! It was a little bit scary, it was a little bit cold and calculating...?! A treasure of a special short story collection, all written bespoke.



未確認生物スペシャル  
Unconfirmed Species Special



## What Happened After the Tea Party

Once, I found a miniature book at the side of the road.

Do you know about miniature books? I speak, as the name implies, of books small enough to fit in the palm of a hand.

It was no mere adjective, there was a whole culture of things of the sort.

They were inconvenient to read, that was true. Well, they were still nice. For being what they were, I mean.

Yes, a miniature book bound in old leather...

I went reading it, squinting at the tiny writing, and it struck me deeply, renewing in me recollections of many years earlier. Of when the world was *exciting*, to say one.

Those were actually memories of when I was in fourth grade at The School, you see.

'Od morn' (Assistant-san's way of speaking had infected me a little).

Let us speak of them.

"So, what is the goal of our Wild Rose Society?"

Hana-senpai tossed me a deep question from across the table.

She was the representative for the traditional secret club here at The School, called the Wild Rose Society. She was a year older than me and a fifth grader.

The Wild Rose Society was a secret club.

Not quite everyone could join, but for some reason my participation was easily accepted. I had nowhere else to be, so lately I had been frequenting this place together with my just-acquainted worst friend Y, hence the present situation.

"Is it searching for the fairies' tea party?"

My answer was met with a quiet shake of senpai's head.

"Non-non-non. Certainly, that is the ultimate goal of the club, but that's not all."

"Then is it to improve the camaraderie between fellow members?"

"Oui. So what do we need in order to do that?"

"...well, nothing else than tea and sweets."

It might have been a roundabout way of putting pressure on me, that was the conclusion I had when senpai took a thin booklet out right before me.

"Those are of course important, but today's topic is this."

It was a thin hand-made book. And it had *Wild Rose News* as title.

"Is this an anthology by the Wild Rose Society?"

"Correct."

I did not know that we would have made this. I quickly flipped through it.





It looked to be a collection of things that had been written by each individual member.

"So tell me, what do you think of our Society's anthology?"

"It feels a little on the thin side."

"What praise you give. It's as you say. In the end, it's the amateurish work of amateurs."

"...I think that, in the end, a club anthology is nothing more than that."

"When one considers that this was made by the Wild Rose Society and all its traditions, it doesn't amount to much, indeed."

This had to be somewhat troubling, given how lofty our ideals were.

Regardless, this volume was definitely all too flimsy for being the anthology of a secret club.

There were the events of passed days, reviews of works of literature, and a little bit of a novelette. All of which were rather idyllic.

"And so we come to you, miss new entry. Could I have you write something for this?"

Hana-senpai's words stimulated my pride a little.

"...I must wonder whether the likes of me have the right to do so, however."

"You are an avid reader, that is more than qualification enough to—"

"Understood, I shall do this!"

"...you certainly seem eager."

And I left her stunned. How embarrassing.

Still and all that aside, I was to work with letters. An experience that made my heart pound hard.

"If you could help, then the next anthology might be that much thicker, I expect."

And so I wrote.

### ***Ancient Fairy Tale Adaptation Series - A "Business-like Interpretation" of The Star Money***

Once upon a time, in a land far far away, there lived an extremely poor little girl.

Poor she was as said, but she still had much, though the cause of her poverty was the passing of her parents.

Her sole and only possessions were the clothes on her back, she did not even have a house to dwell in.

That day she was in a most pitiable lack for anything to eat, so the girl went always hungry.

And there, a cruel woman named Y passed past and belittled the little girl.

"Well now, what a wonderful little girl we got here. I've got an actual family, so I can't even imagine being in her place. All right, I'll give you this leftover bread. I've already eaten part of it, tho, hoh hoh hoh!"

Y tossed the bread at her and left laughing.

And so the little girl was able to come into a little bit of bread.

"This is more than a little bit sad, but I don't mind. It's better than having nothing."

When things worsened even further, this bit of bread would lead her to just that much longer a life.

Though poor, the little girl lived an indomitable life.

"I wish I could survive until the day I can have cake."

The little girl walked down the path while thinking proactively.

And right as she was there came a poor person.

"I can't bear being this hungry. Don't you have anything to eat?"

The little girl considered refusing this request.



However, on thinking about this a little, she decided to give the bread she had to the poor man.

"I'm thankful, but are you sure? I have nothing to give to you in return."

"Please, just give it back when you become rich someday. May you have the blessings of God,"

and with that said, the little girl resumed walking.

Then, after having walked for a bit, she this time met with a child who was crouching and shivering at the side of the road.

It was a cold evening, yet the child was not wearing a coat.

"It's so cold I feel like I'm going to die. Do you have anything for me to wear?"

The little girl did not have anything wearable to spare.

However, she took off the coat she was wearing and offered it to the child.

"Thank you... but I don't have anything to give you in return."

"Young man, all you need to do is return a little bit for it when you become big and can work."

The child uttered many words of gratitude as he left.

The young girl thought about what a nice thing she had done, as while she had lost her coat, she could not avoid feeling something warm filling her heart.

Now then, as she walked even more towards the woods, this time she chanced upon a nearly naked girl.

"Why are you walking in these woods nearly naked?"

"I have no clothes, so it's embarrassing to go near the village. If you have clothes, can I have some?"

The girl said that with a voice that sounded embarrassed.

The little girl of course hesitated, but in responded to what had been requested her, she took off all she was wearing and gave it to the girl.

"This will help much. But I have no money whatsoever to pay you with."

"When you grow up to be an adult, when you come into having a life of plenty, then you can repay me."

"What a nice person you are. Thank you very much."

The girl changed into the clothes and cheerfully headed out to the village at a run.

And so it was that the little girl had lost everything she had, and was left behind alone in uninhabited woods.

Having ended like this, all that awaited her was a slow death, did it not?

No, that was not at all what happened.

The stars that were shining bright in the night sky promptly turned into coins and fell all around the little girl. They were uncountable in number. God had not forsaken the little girl.

Even better, at some point she found herself wearing fine clothes.

And so the girl became very rich.

Several years later, a news magazine called *The Times* came to show the little girl on its cover. In the interview within, the little girl that used to be poor explained how she had become successful like this:

"I gave without regrets things that I couldn't replace to people who were in need."

"Do you mean without any recompense?"

The interviewer promptly interjected with a question.

"Exactly. In the beginning I offered without recompense. However, right now I bind them to a long-term royalty contract. The contract states that, should the person come into gaining anything, a little of that will come to me."

Truth is, that part depicted just now had been omitted in consideration of the children who were reading, and when the little girl gave things away, as she certainly did, she also called upon a scribe to forge a contract. The contract specified that, should the person helped come into having anything, they would have had to pay 5% to the little girl.

It was an astounding figure.

With a tiny initial investment she had come into a lifetime of passive income.

By that time, the little girl had involved several hundred people in that sort of contracts.

Though the contractees were poor people, once that many seeds were sown, all that could sprout would.

Their lives at stake, the people eventually found occupation and reached a standard of living that had no real discomfort, and were then burdened with the duty of paying the little girl for their whole life.

A single drop of water was as precious as gold in a desert, to put it in another way.

Those who only had a scrap of bread when poor were now in this exact same position.

Had she eaten the piece of bread herself, she was unlike to have any greater return than her belly being temporarily filled. An investment in return for temporary discomfort led to great profit.

Thinking that, it is possible to understand the hidden meaning of that final scene, the one where the coins fall down, that inexplicable miracle.

Indeed. The star money was in actuality massive wealth and a high social standing.

And those were certainly not things impossible for our own hands to reach. Stars may start falling on you depending on the courage you put in your choices.

One of those ways was the revolutionary business plan to give freely to people who had fallen upon hard times, but bind them for royalties for their whole life.

"What matters isn't making money. It's how you make it possible to make money."

The little girl was chomping on a high-end cigar as she answered the interviewer.

And, even after that, she used her funds and the land for tax evasion, and she could live happy and rich forever and ever.

And they lived happily ever after (at least until she was arrested).

★★☆☆☆ Way to kill a dream...

Contributor: Hana-senpai

BWAAA-AAAH! This is way too cruel and self-calculating!

A girly-girl like me wishes for her stories to be as sweet as the most sugary of candies~.

Though I still think it's fairly well done. I also do think that there's people who will like this.

But you left your nee-san in shock...

★★★★☆ Sour despite the happy ending

Contributor: Witch-senpai

Does the writer hate having dreams?

Reality can most certainly be harsh, however the writer appears to be much harsher.

Perhaps she enjoys the harshness. Perhaps she only takes her coffee black.

I would recommend reading this only after you have prepared several lumps of sugar for your heart.



★★★★★ A gem of a story for those who get it

Contributor: Curly Hair

This is actually a ten ★.

Like the others have said, there certainly is a somewhat harsh side to this work.

Still, on the other hand, there's no art in hearing the same story every time.

I believe it a good thing that there's a fairy tale made like this, and there have to be people who understand this, though their number may be few. There have to be, somewhere.

The work is a fairy tale targeted to adults.

And I think it's cool that it's so adult-oriented.

It's marvelous.

☆☆☆☆☆ In a certain sense, tho, it was interesting LOL

Contributor: Worst Friend

A literary work's gotta make readers dream, shyeah, otherwise it's useless.

...and that was how the criticism went from people who had read it.

Average looked like it would hit the three ★, but then there was that defensive review using forced jargon, and...

I was Little Miss in the Awkward Position.

I decided to hold a cultural shoot-out with one of those who had reviewed my work, as I was not convinced about her intentions with that review.

**Ms. Worst Friend's review commentary (means the topic is everything that's been submitted)**

**Comment from a passer-by:**

I carefully read your review, and I felt that it was much too one-sided.

What I want to say is that I don't think fairy tales must necessarily make someone dream.

I felt that this work was more than a little inspirational.

Your criticism isn't appropriate.

**Comment from Worst Friend:**

Oh, an author, are we?

**Comment from a passer-by:**

N-, no, I'm not! I-, I'm just a reader.

**Comment from Worst Friend:**

...uh-huh. Well, that's fine anyway.

Mebbe it's an extreme view, but not being happy after reading something's unconditionally unacceptable.

**Comment from a passer-by:**

That's absolutely untrue. There are many fairy tales with dark endings.

**Comment from Worst Friend:**

And if there are, they're poorly rated.

**Comment from a passer-by:**

They're not. What actually passes through the ages and remains to us are the truly superlative works.

**Comment from Worst Friend:**

Except the crowd doesn't really enjoy all these superlative works.

**Comment from a passer-by:**

The problem with that lays with the reader, I'd say. If you as the reader lack in education, then there's as many works as you like that you won't be able to enjoy.

**Comment from Worst Friend:**

Ah, and there we go with the discriminatory comments. You tellin' me that people without an education can't understand how good this tale is? Try realizing instead how, if you follow along this reasoning, you can justify whatever garbage you write. People who vaunt themselves of their education are nothing more than snobs.

"I cannot ignore this use of 'snob!'"

I was so angry that, slam, I pounded the table.

Before me was my Worst Friend Y, haughtily stretching her legs on the table.

"But she said that you can't judge your own writing without having an education, right? That's bein' a snob."

Snob.

It was easily one of the top three words I never wanted to say.

But getting worked up in my reply was just what my counterpart wanted.

This was the point in the game when I had to speak coldly...

"You are wrong. The majority of fairy tales are opportunistic, and what I did was my own style of interpretation, fixing and adding in order to make one of them more convincing. This is what humor is about! Whoever wants to understand can do so. However, humor is also when whoever wants to reject it can do so."

"You're graspin' at straws!"

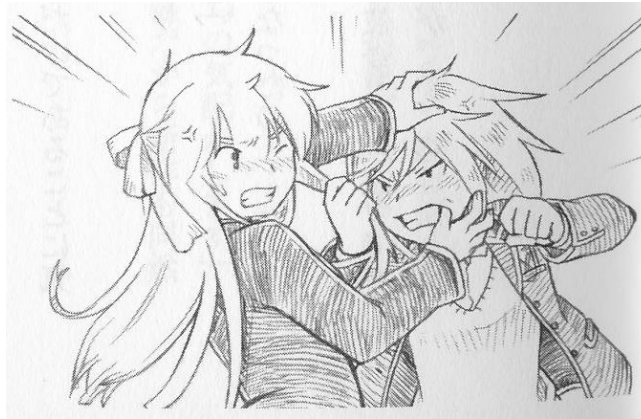
Y sneered nastily at me.

And this, well, how to put it, I could only feel so angry that my hand accidentally went forwards. Youth was to blame.

"You bigot!"

"You ex-broomhead!"





It appeared that a violent fight had broken out.

"...though the reviews are mixed, if we don't print this then we can't fill out the page number. That's why we will print this, and thus it is decided!"

Chief editor Hana-senpai told me that after I had returned from a trip to the school infirmary. All right, I was published.

...and I was genuinely happy about it. Way I was, I could certainly not remain a child forever. To tell the truth, the deadline was by then approaching, which was why the decision was made.

But not being published because of my own skills was disappointing.

Still, there were some capable of accepting even something that mean. They were called Adult Women.

"For now we publish it, then it comes down to waiting for the readers' criticism... you might get some impressive reviews, all that said."

It was treated like a Problematic Work. One more show of cleverness and it might have ended in book-burning.

That was a form of glory, perhaps. At least, given how it appeared I was going to bequeath my name to history with it.

"By the way, did the other members write something of their own?"

I rapidly but carefully read through and noticed that I was the only one to have contributed a longer piece of writing.

"...everybody else's work was rejected."

"Having your own work rejected and still making reviews like those for other works, well, what to say..."

"And they didn't just have their work rejected, but also they're showing up at club less and less as school approaches its final day..."

"It just tears at your heart."

On the other hand, people like the AB-senpais did not need to throw out a mass of vicious rumor-mongering, they could fulfill their own obligations even without writing anything by assisting with the editing. This is what one would call Getting Along.

"All pages check out." "We're publishing this, right prez~."

The AB-senpais put the original script into the press and began printing in massive numbers.

"There is only one longer piece of fiction writing, so it might stand out..."

"Worse, it's a Problematic Work."

"Now that you say it, my literary skills have become scarily good. It might leave something of a strong impression on the population..."

"What a high evaluation of yourself you have..."

"It appears that the new work will stand out, and not in a good way, in an anthology that is mostly republishing past articles."

"Call it republishing if you like, but it's all material from a hundred years ago, or maybe two hundred, or even from one thousand year ago, so they may as well be new."

"Thinking about it, we could just borrow whatever we like without needing to bother with making an adaptation."

I could have declared that I would pass past data off as my own creative work.

I could have had the popularity of a pioneer. Without breaking my back.

Why did you not actually go ahead with that, me?

"Well, not receiving scathing criticism like before alone would make this outing much better."

"Let's hold hopes for the sensitivity of readers."

Hana-senpai smiled.

That being said, unease was coupled with expectations, and I could only exhale a long sigh. Releasing a product into the wilds was no comfortable thing, you see.

All else aside, the Wild Rose Society's anthology *Wild Rose News* was published quietly, as befitting a secret club, and just as quietly circulated through the marketplace (the school itself).

And a review came from the unlikeliest of places.

"I have read the anthology, and I must say your work was interesting and amusing. I'm extremely glad for it."

As I walked down the corridor while thinking about nothing in particular I was addressed like that, which visibly startled me.

"Ahem... I see that our esteemed principal is sure capable of discovering concealed texts."

Those were the words I returned him once I had at last calmed down.

All else aside, that was the anthology of a secret club, so it would not be widely circulated. They were usually left hidden about for people to find on their own, and, among the thirty issues published so far, there were some concealed quite complexly.

"This last decade, *Wild Rose News* has seen neither alterations nor particular tricks in the way it's distributed, so it was actually easy to find. The most effortless way was to go to the library, the latest issue is always on the shelf with the new print editions."

"...well now, well now."

"Sure, *Star Money* was a flawed work even among fairy tales, but I couldn't believe it could've been as easily reinterpreted as that. You had me read something I can call good. You're wonderfully talented."

Well, that was the first time in my life I had been praised like that, and on the spot I could not even find the words to reply with. And this despite how the principal was so easy to talk to...

"The teachers to a one also said it was good."

Ugh, it looked like my work circulated even among the teachers!

Since the Japanese teacher was one of them, I quickly felt embarrassed.

"...the problem is just, you know, this won't be well received except by those with stained minds."

"What?"

"Your fairy tale is unlikely to be well received by pure-hearted students. Instead I expect that



only adults, who have bitten into the bitter and the sweet of life, will be able to understand this."

I was unsure of whether I should have felt elated by that or not.

Not being well received among those of similar age was a little bit sad.

Still, it went as I thought, all just as predicted...

"And so, well, I had this idea of sending this of yours to friends of the age range which would enjoy it, so I've photocopied the anthology and am going to mail it around. I'll be sending almost five hundred copies. Hoh hoh hoh!"

"Wah, having something of mine circulated so widely puts me on the spot, indeed it does!"

"And isn't that nice. It's not like it's your diary or anything. Literature is made to be read by people. What we have here is a young person in the current era writing something more than a little bit interesting. It's the duty of an educator to take responsibility and spread it to the world."

"I had not even imagined that I would be read by people all over the world, so I must confess I do not know whether I will be able to handle the pressure."

"Also, thinking about the individual personal connections of those five hundred people, it's probable that the range will be expanded and that you will be read by as many as three thousand people."

"That is even more embarrassing! I am afraid that it will be judged too harshly and I will end up hated."

"You'll be all right, I believe that. That's because you didn't use your real name but a pen name, Watashi. I don't think any personal information will be leaked. Plus yours is a secret club."

...truth is, ours was a *secret but not too secret* society. After all, our anthology's hiding places were all too easily discovered.

"You might even get some fan letters."

"That would be a problem for me."

"Maybe you should consult the counseling service."

"But I am just a young girl!"

"I must add that I've already arranged distribution. At present they are getting posted all over the world."

"Aieeee!"

I had the feeling that this pattern, one where I was too late to react in occasions like these, was already repeating frequently in my life.

That issue of *Wild Rose News* was reprinted and reprinted, and circulated to a total of five thousand copies, a spectacular feat that, generally speaking, wrecked to the heart the calm and collected personality I believed to have.

"May this never be read by anyone. Should anyone read this, may they not leave too much of a scathing review."

I suffered under the pressure of having my writing read by a number of people beyond counting.

It was a mere reprinting, but what a problem it left me!

The very small printing press of the Association was not enough, we had to borrow The School's larger-scale press in order to publish enough. And that did not end within the day, it was a strenuous effort across multiple consecutive days. I had no memory-like memories of the about one week spent doing incessant physical labor.

Thanks to that, I forgot even my unease.

"I shall accept even the most scathing of criticism."

I arrogantly boasted that in the middle of the room, however what came in surpassed even my predictions.

"Sweets-chan, a letter has arrived."

Hana-senpai had one letter in hand as she arrived.



"Where did that letter come from?"

"...from beyond the sea, it seems."

"So you have no idea."

"Read it."

"I will, promptly."

The letter was a review of my work.

"Huuuh. Impressive. How was it?"

I stared at senpai's face.

"...it appears they enjoyed it. They say it was well-written. And that they cheer for the literary works of a young person."

"Hoh-hoh, what a relief to hear that your work was well-received among those of a certain age. It's good to hear, isn't it!"

"Yes, well, of course..."

Well, it was something to be happy about. Very much so, for all that I was resolved to a harsher response.

"I came with a letter and provisions for Sweets-chan~."

Right then Witch-senpai showed up and tendered me a second letter.

My face and Hana-senpai's turned towards each other.

"Well now, your onee-san is surprised at how meritorious you've been."

Hana-senpai was waving an exquisitely elaborate fan as she said that.

That exquisitely elaborate fan was a present to our club.

Strictly speaking, it had been addressed to me.

"Come now, receiving thirty letters is the bare minimum, you should have gotten five thousand."

Witch-senpai was arranging for a place to set down a Sancai horse.

That ornament had also been addressed to me.

"What else from you, oneesan. We got so many tea leaves we can't nearly drink them all!"

Curly Hair had been filling the shelves with a mass of canned tea leaves, but as she could not fit them all in, she carried the excess cans out to the corridor.

And those tea cans... they were all addressed to me.

The present situation was tremendously problematic.

Objets d'art, writings, drinks and foodstuff... the massive amount of presents threatened to bury the room.

"Now that I say it, among the friends of the principal there are many people in the education business as well as School graduates. Those people act more lenient when it comes to the efforts of currently enrolled students, don't they."

"Still, this is too much for being just leniency. It's more like an old granddad spoiling his children."

"...senpais, I offer my deepest apologies for having made so much noise of this."

I could not believe it, this had geometrically expanded from 500 people to over 5000.

The connections of older people were terrifying.

"Got us some more offerings!"

Y had come by, basically kicking the door open.

"Really now, we got no more place to put things..."

"This one's real small. And it's kinda suspect... it got no sender name on it."

"What? Where did it come from?"

"Also unknown. Have it that it was found in front of the main building's entrance this morning."

The item was a small parcel the size of a palm.

It only had the address of *Wild Rose Society-sama*, it had nothing else written on it.

Inside were about five miniature books.

"Oh, there's a tiny receipt inside too."

Y had of course opened the palm-sized letter and began reading it.

"Hummm... thank you for always being there for us! We have decided to make a wooden print block of your *Star Money* and we're now announcing it to you... wait, the hell's this?"

"They decided to make a wooden print block, are these miniature books the result?"

There were five miniature books inside the parcel.

They were quite solidly made, and if I was not mistaken the level of this craft was higher than that of our own presses.

And indeed, they contained a verbatim of the *Star Money* I had written.

"...what goal do they have with all this?"

"Who knows."

Y shrugged.

Somewhere in the world there were people who liked my revised fairy tale, and those people had a quite high-level printing equipment, and used it to print (I suspected large amounts of) miniature books, sending a few as repayment to me, the writer... that was how I believed it went.

Who and where would do that?

...and with that we come back to the present.

Now that I remember, with every anthology released I wrote an adapted fairy tale.

And every time I had that someone decide to make a wooden print block and offer me



miniature books.

Back then I had no idea whatsoever as to whom might have done that.

Now I could do that very easily.

"So that was what it was."

The miniature book I had picked up was titled *The Dragon on the Signboard*, which was patterned after the actually extant ancient work *The Tiger on the Folding Screen*.

I could not believe that the fairy tales I had written would circulate among them, and become popular as material for their pretend-play... I had just thought, no, this could never have been. Because I hated standing out in this bad a way.

Except that, to make a relevant example, the Grimm fairy tales became historically famous only when the brothers Grimm compiled them into an anthology.

Then was it possible that even I could become famous in odd ways?

"I do not wish to leave behind something in that shape!"

And now that it was all in the past, I could do nothing but hope for that.



## A Memorandum Concerning a Self-Professed Future Person

Kusunoki Village has been having a Prophecy Boom of late.

People to the last loved prophecies and fortune-telling.

Be they based on weather, blood type, astrology, or opportunities and phenomenons of every possible kind, people went asking for their fortune, good or bad, regarding where they were going.

And those predictions were purchasable from a vending machine here in Kusunoki.

We could tell everything about the future.

It was nothing less than a fabulous and progressive technological revolution. Truly marvelous as well as smile-ful... was what was not thinkable at all.

"I went and investigated!"

I'd had Assistant-san go and investigate.

What follows is a summary of the investigation.

- \* The Prophecy Machine can only be utilized in a specific time period in the evening.

- \* Because of that, people are rushing at it.

- \* The prophecies themselves don't come true most of the time?

- \* Machine functionality requires food and miscellanea.

Easy and nice, was it not. Using people, I mean.

"Still, that was unexpected. See, I was actually resolved to a report that said that the world was going to go to the dogs because the accuracy of prediction machinery made by fairies is one hundred percent."

"Well, concerning that..."

Regarding the predictions, while there were people who said they came true there were some that felt they did not, and so public evaluation of them was unsteady... that was how it went.

"So this is not the doing of fairies?"

"False accusations, if I may say?"

"There was no advance warning."

One of them entered the conversation, complaining on top of the desk.

And if he was saying this, it followed that the fairies had nothing to do with this at least this time.

I was to investigate this personally, then.

In the evening, on the way back home from work, I approached the central square with the prediction machine as my goal.

A crowd of people was forming a line, and the head of it disappeared off in an alleyway.

I peeked into the alley, wondering how far the head of the line was, and I was overwhelmed in finding that the line went for far longer than I imagined. I could still not see the head.

Overwhelmed like that meant I had to change my mind, that was the person that I was.

"Rennet, please. I live alone, so one small bag of it."

"Aye ma'am. You making cheese, right? Don't need milk?"

"No, I am getting the milk from UN rationing."

I did not want to get in line so much that I ended up giving priority to groceries.

"This is terrifying... how can people lining up in this queue be so calm?"

It would have taken around an hour for someone lining up at the end to have their turn.

The people in the line did not look like they disliked being there at all, they were having fun chatting, they were reading books, they were all cheery as they waited for their turn.

"The prediction's not their goal, lining up is their goal!"

A fairy in my breast pocket said that.

"That right there would be reversing cause and effect."

"They're just in the flow of things!"

"The flow, right..."

One could not keep up with the times unless they crested the wave of the current flow, then.

But cresting a wave just meant to drown to death off the coast.

"I cannot quite stand to line up there."

It would have been nicer if they delivered. Home delivery, that was the best, home delivery.

"What else from Kusunoki's Queen of Home Deliveries, master human!"

"...everyone has the right to come into possession of things regardless of how they are staying at home."

And just as I was thinking of giving up for the day and going home...

"Ah, sensei. Good evening!"

K-san, who was in line, addressed me just as I was hesitating as to what to do.

"You are quite the trend-follower, K-san."

"Oh, half of this is for the job."

She nonchalantly said that.

"Ahhh... this is a job for a Man in Black, then."

K-san was a special agent affiliated with the UN's Intelligence Agency.

Intelligence used to perform special agent affairs such as the spy business, but, as guessable, they had so little work to do that they changed substantially.

Right now they did... what, exactly?

As far as I could hear and see, they listened to the Village's people (espionage), investigated the amount of residents (espionage), helped with major construction jobs (construction espionage), and held classes on arts and crafts (construction espionage).

In particular, Elite Agent K-san's skill in the crafts is a bit above human average, and when she became serious she could even take notes using embroidery. That was amazing.

It appeared that it was a tradition for black uniforms to be the clothing of craftsmen.

That was why one could occasionally spot black uniforms around Kusunoki even in the present day.

The men in black used to visit those careless citizens who spread witness accounts of flying saucers and say,

*"Flying saucers are state secrets. You can't talk about them, mister. Here's a Mouth-Sealing Lollipop."*

*"Wah-woaaaah, right aVAy!"*

...and that was how they sealed mouths, for example. What to even say about that.

"These are certainly prophecies, I see. Men in Black must investigate them."

"That said, half of it is curiosity, heh heh heh!"

And it was then that a devil of an idea flashed into my mind.

"...should you actually get a prophecy, could you please show it to me?"



"That I can do~."

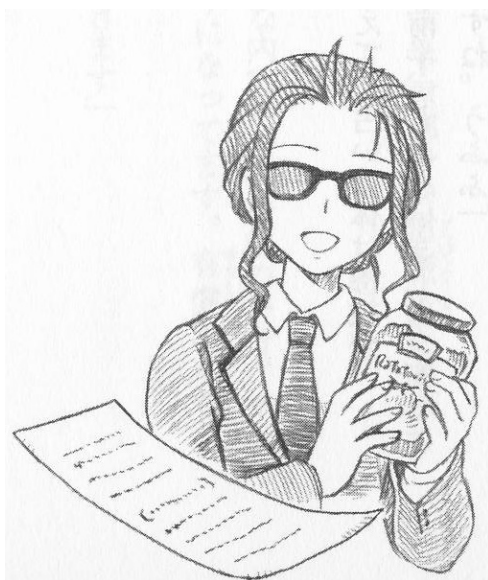
"Thank you very much. I will wait as I prepare dinner."

I was using people. And this one to exhaustion.

Given that, with everything, the latter half would end up being my own tiring efforts (and my experiential resignation to that was one I had actively cultivated throughout my life thus far), then I would say that getting someone else to bang out the opening moves was all right. All that was left was to wait for the evening.

"About that prophecy, this is what came out."

In the evening K-san came to visit my house, so we decided to have dinner together. As promised, she had brought the prophecy that she had requested.



It was a vertical strip of paper on which tiny text was tightly written.

**You desire to be loved by people, but at the moment it feels like there are too many things lacking in you.**

**You live according to your rules, but at times you wonder whether that is a good thing.**

**You have a personality that is easily likable, but you also have a shier side.**

**Also, you have a tendency to indulge in unrealistic delusions.**

***And that's who you are, now here's your prophecy!***

**A sudden rain harms the ground.**

**That is an omen of a great disaster.**

**You will not die before the sun declines by about 40 degrees.**

**After that, Mars is likely to dominate your fortune.**

I enjoyed dinner with K-san.

Menu was pea soup, cod meunière, and ice cream as dessert. Plus bread and cheese. K-san brought in a bottle of ratatouille. It was incredibly delicious.

"I scream!" "Wann'it!" "I want it so much I don't want it!"

The fairies each had their own personal share of ice cream.

It was a loud dinner.

After dining, we once again investigated what the prophecy said.

"With what is written on it aside, this has been printed with a printing device."

The writing was not made by hand, it was the output of a machine.

"It was. It was a desktop printer. You tell your blood type and all that to the person, but the fortune telling itself comes from a machine."

"The structure is such that the first half is an evaluation of the person, while the second half is a prophecy. What did you think of this first half?"

"Reading it I feel it's sort of-kind of on the dot, isn't it. Heh heh heh!"

...leisurely lady, her.

"I am very sorry, but this is just a clever trick."

"What, a trick?"

"I think what is written in the first four columns could be true for just about anyone... sort of like, they intentionally chose words to that effect."

"Well, now that you say it, it does also feel a bit like that."

"Now what was it, I am sure it was the something-effect in psychology."

"Barnum Effect!"

A fairy poked his head out from behind a cooking pot, said what he needed to say, then immediately withdrew.

Right, the Barnum Effect.

"So, the first four lines could fit just about anyone. Therefore, anyone reading them would get the illusion that they fit them personally."

"Ah-hah, so that's how it works."

"And if one analyzed the first four lines and felt that they fit them, this would increase the credibility of the second half, would it not?"

"What do you think about the second half, the prophecy?"

"They look like a four-line poem, there is nothing too specific to seize upon in them, and the final column's take on Mars is a ripoff of Nostradamus' prophecies. Did you pay for this?"

"Yes. I handed materials to the operator, that's the price for one prophecy."

"Then this is fraud."

"My. Would that mean I've been swindled, then?"

K-san said that in a none too serious manner.

"What was the damage?"

"Three potatoes, sensei."

"That was certainly something. Nothing to sneeze about."

"I don't feel like I've sneezed about anything."

Even if individually the damage was small, given how long a queue they had, accumulate and accumulate as they did, they likely no longer had to worry about hunger anymore.

These were swindlers who accumulated material via fraudulent prophecies.

"Now what do we do about all this..."

As this did not involve fairies, it was outside of my jurisdiction, however.

"I suppose that this might be in our jurisdiction, however, and in that case I would petition you for assistance, sensei."

"....."

It was exactly as she said.

When it was time to take responsibility it was ever harder to escape.  
"Nothing to be done about it, I must stand in line myself!"

It took a little less than an hour from when I first stood in line to reaching the prophecy device.  
...it was tiresome.

The queue for today ended with me, so I was the last user.

"Welcome to Prophecy Mansion."

Deep into a dead end that extended from an alley, enveloped by a mysterious darkness, there laid a space that was out of the ordinary.

The first thing that drew my eyes was a fairly large tent.

It was the kind that would be used by nomadic tribes, it was a dwelling of thick cloth.

Within it, there laid scattered a number of occult symbols, such as that famous Eye of Providence (but hand-drawn), a rosary (but hand-carved), and a crystal ball (but made of glass), all so bewitching that they unleashed a torrential wave of wonder.

"A stray sheep, are we? The contribution first, please."

A woman in a habit requested a valuable with an unnaturally solemn tone of voice.

"Now then, are you perhaps a nun?"

"No, I'm wearing this since I happened to own it... I'm not exactly a nun or anything."

She answered plainly, unlike the solemn tone she had had a moment before.

Looking more closely I found that the habit was a patched-together antique. In short, not work clothes.

"Mh, patched-together?"

Now where did I see someone like that?

Her face was what I wanted to see, but it was covered by a veil.

"The Prophecy Device can be used twice should you provide with valuables such as dresses or decorations, once if provided with daily necessities."

The lady once more feigned a solemn tone of voice as she systematically listed prices.

I offered the onions that I had brought with.

"Then you shall be able to use the machine once."

I was for some reason handed an antique coin and urged to enter within the tent.

And then I was face to face with the prophecy machine at last.

At the center of the tent, which was dimly lit with the exception of a dull light sedimenting at the feet, there dazedly stood out a largish machine. *Ohhh, this is the Prophecy Device so spoken about in the streets, thank you, oh thank you!* ...except being knocked over about that sort of religious experience would be much too impertinent of me.

Were I to have been knocked over, it would have been to an equipment similar to a soft drink vending machine as created by the former humanity. No, well, this was basically, and no mistake, a vending machine...

Was it a recycled one?

In other words, a machine that operated on those coins that were now no longer used.

I put the coin in the slot, chose one of the several buttons and pushed it, and ka-thump, it made a sound and a can rolled down and into the retrieval slot.

"So the prophecy paper was inside a can..."

Lessee lessee. Let us try reading.

**You treat yourself well, and you particularly loathe it when you have to do hard work for the sake of others.**



**You do find it worthwhile to talk to people, but you also find time for yourself to be important.**

**You have the strength to believe anything as real, but at the same time you are frail, and can get hurt by doing that.**

**You do want to be liked by people, but you also feel like you have vulnerabilities.**

***And that's who you are, now here's your prophecy!***

**When your voice raises to a shout on top of a hill, a great secret shall be revealed. It will be something likely to bring tears of tragedy to a number of people beyond count.**

**You will not die before the sun declines by about 40 degrees.**

**After that, Mars is likely to dominate your fortune.**

Well, was this not much too haphazard even for being randomly selected?

This could only be produced by casually combining some of a great number of pre-prepared and just as seemingly fitting lines. This was the kind of stuff a human that worked their hands in programming could spit out easy-peasy. Besides, variations must also be few, because part of this was copied straight from the one K-san had gotten...

This sort of things was what we generally called memes.

"...this is a fraud, right?"

I complained to Patchwork-san, who was biting into a sandwich in the back of the tent.

"Khoff! Khoff!"

She coughed violently and her headwear fell to the ground. Her face became bared.

"Well now? You are that girl from the poorhouse, are you not?"

She twitched, then stiffened.



"Se-, sensei... please, don't..."

If I remembered correctly, once the priest that ran the poorhouse passed on, she succeeded him as the eldest in age.

"How did you manage life after all that happened?"

"With difficulties, like always..."

"Huh? But then how is it that am I sure it had improved since then?"

"Ah, right! We were no longer at a loss for meat..."

"Then why did you need to engage in this fraud?"

Patchwork-san opened her eyes wide.

She nimbly pressed something in the palm of my hand.

"Sensei! May I ask you to keep this all a secret?"

Could this possibly be the Legendary Oriental Negotiating Art, the Yamabuki (gold coin) Sweet?

...I see, so I had now become a Government Official against whom bribes would work, would they not, but as I inspected, beaming happily, what had been pressed in my hand...

...was a tiny tomato.

"I got no need for the likes of this."

It needed Prompt Eating.

Prompt Eating: a vulgar technique kids love where one held the tiny tomato with fingertips, tapped it with the bottom part of the palm, and let the undulation catapult it into the oral cavity.

"Wah, my precious vegetable! Well, it's still all right... it seems my bribe has been accepted."

Whoops.

It happened that my Prompt Eating had the effect of me accepting the bribe.

A debacle... via something that I could grow myself.

"So, what is this all about?"

"Well, you see, the poorhouse is as its name says, poor, so I'm staving off hungry mouths with a side job, and... it's to ensure my brothers can eat, so..."

She made an excuse that was somewhat inarticulate.

This was suspicious.

"This is dirty business, however. It is fraud, to call it anything."

"W-, well..."

"I suppose, for all that, this does not involve a prank by the fairies, so it is in fact beyond my jurisdiction. I simply want to understand what goes on behind it. It might not be particularly important for you to explain everything."

The implication of my words held Patchwork-san in conflict for a moment, but eventually she slumped her shoulders in disappointment.

Invited to the poorhouse for a complete confession, I was now visiting the place.

The poorhouse that I knew was a run-down former church, but seeing it towering like something from an alternate dimension struck me dumb.

"You... have an impressive building there."

It was distant from the restrained image of people in a poorhouse living in poverty, it had been turned into this towering gold-colored palace.

It reminded me of the book I had read a long while before at The School, *Photobook of the Headquarters of a Mysterious Religious Group*. It felt sparkly and glistening, it was shining.

Please understand me when I say that, all right.

"...back when our life had begun to improve a little bit, just when we were saying good-bye to

leaky roofs, we asked people to rebuild the place and this is what came out of that. We spoke to the carpenters, telling them that the original building had been a church, and they said sure, let's make it church-like then, and as they went with that, well..."

"This here is of the wrong religion. Those things look like Buddha statues."

With the difference however that they were not Buddha statues.

"It's great to live in... it's got no roof leaks and it's big and occasionally people come to confess their sins and leave behind food, it's nothing but good things."

"Good to hear that your Search for Good Things is going well..."

The prophecy thing caused a complete reversal. It was impressive to hear.

Children were running about within the building.

"The number of children increased, has it not?"

"In the past we were eight, but now we're more than thirty. Perhaps it's because we have more than what's enough to sustain ourselves, but the number has increased, you see."

If you declare loudly that you will raise even the most stray of cats, then everyone will come to drop strays in your lap, she basically said.

"It does certainly seem like a big task to raise all these children."

I had experience with being a teacher, which was why I ended up sympathizing a little bit.

"With their number having increased to this extent, it's of course a problem to raise them all only on the providence from Heaven."

I see. That was why she entered the marketplace with a dirty business.

Poverty breeds crime.

"Being children they can't just work the field. Ah, yes, the child I was talking about is over there."

Patchwork-san pointed at a corner of the room.

Over there stood a tiny girl cloaked from head to toes with an overcoat like a witch in a tale.

"That girl is our prophetess."

I approached the girl and peered at her face.

For her part she glared at my face.

"Good morning, miss prophetess. Glad to meet you."

I tried greeting her. When I did,

"G'bye!"

Here came another contrarian. My instinct was screaming that I had to confront this person with a certain resolve to it.

The prophetess was 10 years old.

She was a newcomer to the poorhouse, had no parents, and had been a live-in employee with a private caravan group thus far, but she was then dismissed and put into foster care at the 'house, that was how her life went.

"I'm the designer of the prophecy machine. You may worship me."

She had dark golden hair and a face that still had freckles. She wore a hood from the head that gave her the styling of a witch.

...she was an exceedingly good fit for a fortune teller.

"I avoid worshiping anyone who is not superior to me."

"Fool!"

It did not look like we were establishing a conversation.

Normally, a 10 years old would be much more adult.

"I imagine this personality is why she has been fired."



"That's right. In exchange for taking care of her, we were introduced with preferentiality to a large number of carpenters."

Why that sort of back-alley deals, truly...

The people of the caravan, too, could not stand this child, and that is why it ended like this. It felt a little bit sad.

"She said designer, but her job was to fix vending machines, correct?"

"The girl can use computers a little bit. That's how she put together the prophecy program and stuffed several thousand printed prophecy papers into cans. In the beginning we sold this sort of like drawing lots, but... it became too popular."

Thinking herself praised, the prophetess puffed her chest.

"Giving up? Will you worship?"

"Worship is not something you seek. It is what you earn naturally. Did you understand, little miss prophetess?"

"Wrong!"

"What am I wrong about?"

"I'm not a prophetess, I'm from the future."

I was told all I needed to be told.

From the future. A future person. *Homo futuris*.

"So you came back from the future?"

The girl puffed her chest.

"Exactly."

I enjoyed cynical talks with fairies on a daily basis, but I found it difficult to simply accept the existence of a person from the future.

"Supposing you did come from the future, then how many years ahead?"

"No idea about that. But it's the far future."

"Did you come back on a time machine or something?"

"No idea about that either. But I'm from the future."

I looked at Patchwork-san seeking help and found that she, too, had a face that said she needed help.

This was too much for us. It was vividly visible.

"...sensei, this girl has kept saying this as long as I've known her. She keeps saying that what is accurate of her isn't a prophecy. It's bringing us knowledge of the future."

"Ah, so that is what she chose as her made-up background."

The Prophecy Boom had erased the poorhouse's harsh dietary situation.

That said, the little girl that was originator and main laborer was, all else aside, hard to easily interact with.

How to deal with her, that, the much older Patchwork-san did not know, either.

That was the visual of what was going on.

Miss Future Girl looked up at me with eyes filled with animosity then, swish, pointed her index at me.

"You will die in agony in three days!"

"...I am still alive."

There I was on the fourth day, living.

It was a refreshing morning.

"There is nothing certain about prophecy."

Within me, the girl from the future had fallen to 'self-professed' status.

And, at the exact same time, the Prophecy Boom was starting to see its decline.  
One of the reasons was the low accuracy.  
The prophecies were just too vague. Depending on interpretation, they might even have even impact the life and death of a person deeply.  
Even though the time spent interpreting them was fun, the magic of the moment disappeared and one woke up, harshly so.  
That was what prophecies were.  
I believe the Boom would have gone into a Bust even if the prophecies had not been that sensationalistic, but that was not the case.  
It was only natural that people's interests would shift to something else.  
I did go and see that back alley, but the tent had already been dismantled, and what remained was only the vending machine, which had originally been found abandoned in this place to begin with.  
Its vital power unit removed, even pressing the buttons the machine did not elicit a response.  
So long as people's minds had not been led astray, it could have been said that the matter had solved itself naturally.  
It felt just a little bit like indigestion, but my work was with this done.  
...or it would have been nice if it had been, right.

"Say, mister fairy, it is difficult to go to the past, is it not?"

One time, I tried asking that.

The fairy busy working as a desktop pen holder set down the pen he was holding and answered this.

"How 'bout reading a book?"

I see, reading a book might always bring a vicarious experience of the past, but what I was talking about was not that.

"What if I wanted to just go to the past, and not just read about it?"

"Bananas?"

"And not using Timebananas."

Those bananas seemed to be promptly available, you see, so when asking this sort of questions bananas frequently came up as an answer.

"...it's reeeal hard."

It was rare a fairy would say this.

Moving through time was as difficult as expected, then.

"Then I will reverse the question, what about going to the future?"

"If you're alive, then you're always, automatically, going to the future, yanno?"

Philosophy, huh.

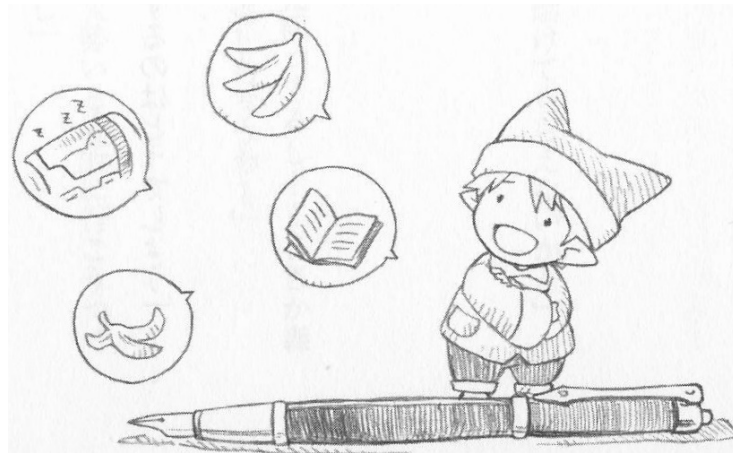
"A leap, can we have a leap. A time leap!"

"...like frozen in a capsule?"

"Without using freezing."

The fairy fell silent.

"How many bananas are allowed?"



He spoke like he was asking whether bananas would be included in today's tea sweets.

"They are currently forbidden."

The fairy crossed his arms and sunk into thought.

"If I may speak honestly, this is real hard!"

"It is fine if the body does not leap in time. What about a time leap of only consciousness?"

"Still haaard!"

Hard even to leap with consciousness alone, then.

"The wall of time is thick, I see."

"It's because old man space-time really doesn't like that!"

"Old man..."

All in all, it appeared correct to think that people who went upstream in the river of time did not quite exist.

But that girl did not seem to be telling a lie.

I could not think of any other conclusion:

she truly believed herself to be from the future. In short, she was delusional.

A life lived embracing a delusion...

...it had a nasty aftertaste.

Patchwork-san came to the Office on official duty as the eldest at the poorhouse.

"The girl has run away."

"My, that is a problem!"

"She even picks fights with the other children, you know, since she has that sort of personality. I don't think someone who forges her own path like you would understand, though, sensei..."

"But I understand very well."

With a personality like hers it was expectable she would pick fights with everybody.

"I've been searching for her for a while, but I can't find her... and I'm wondering if you could help, sensei, since you know about her."

"When did she run away?"

"Two days ago..."

She would have been living out in the wilds by then.

"Do you have any idea as to where she could have gone?"

"She's not from these lands so I have no idea, no. I went around to look at the buildings

nearby several times, and... she can't possibly have gone into the woods...? Awww, I'm going back to searching for Bad Things to complain about again!"

"I think she may be within the Village."

"You do? Why?"

"Inference. Since she is confident about her prophecies, I think that she might have gone someplace where there are crowds of people that would listen to her, you see. At the very least, that is what I would have done, having had a successful experience of that."

"Ah, I see..."

"That said, the Village right now is vast, see. I will use my Office to search for her. You can go back to the poorhouse and look after the children."

Patchwork-san stood up with moist eyes.

"Thank you, sensei, I leave it all to you... but I am worried that, even if she came back, that girl wouldn't fit in."

That I completely agreed with.

In a corner of the central square there sat a street fortune teller.

"How much is it to be told a fortune?"

The girl on the opposite side of the tiny desk lifted up her head.

"This is not fortune telling, this is street prophesying... ah, you're the fool from the other day."

"Good evening. Things do not seem to be going well, are they?"

I had been watching her for a while after spotting her, but despite this great flow of people, there were nearly none who stopped by and asked something of her.

"These ignorant people don't understand the value of prophecy!"

"The Boom has moved on. It is not about prophecies anymore."

"Then what is it about?!"

I pointed at the square. The next fad was there.

A large number of people was transfixed by this one show.

"What's that?"

"That... is a show about spoon bending."

*And now to show you how to bend a spoon without touching it!*

The calls for viewers were answered with a thunderous applause.

"It seems they are making a real uproar over there."

"Agggggh..."

Yes. At present we were in a Supernatural Powers Boom.

"But mine is not some show it's the futuuure!"

"Your accuracy is much too low, see, for being a prophetess."

Miss Self-Professed Future Girl shook in anger.

She however could not find argumentative words to return to that, and eventually slumped her shoulders in disappointment.

"I did hear, you know. You caused trouble at home and ran away, correct?"

"...it's because those guys don't believe in prophecies."

That was because there are no people who would believe prophecies that did not come true, of course.

"So you ran away from the poorhouse, but what did you do about a place to sleep in?"

The girl was wordless.

"And the food?"

The girl was wordless.

I sharply heard the sound of her belly instead.

"...ngggh"

"You are not sleeping properly, nor eating. Your clothes are quite unkempt."

I tossed her one of the sandwich wraps I had with me.

"Food!"

The girl leaped at the sandwich and flattened it in an instant.

"I will make a prophecy in return for your generosity. You shall not die before two days are past."

"Those prophecies of yours are all misses at this point."

Miss Future Girl tossed in her mouth even the bread crumbs that had remained in the wrapping, then began sorting her bags.

"Where do you think you are going?"

"I don't want to go back to the poorhouse. I'm leaving."

"And where will you go? How much distance do you think there is between here and the neighboring villages?"

"..."

She had not thought about that, it seemed.

"If you don't want to go back to the poorhouse no matter what, then stop over at my house for a while. If you help me with my work, I will guarantee basic accommodations and food."

"...why do that?"

"Because I still cannot prove that you are not really from the future. It is possible that you really are. And if you really are from the future, then there are many things I would like to ask." When I said that the girl's face shone in ways I had never seen before.

"Who's the girl?"

"Someone who has been left in my care. She is Future Girl. She will be with us for a while."

"Again with your eccentricities. Well done."

Y said that like it did not concern her.

The way she looked at children was the same as her looking at a wild animal.

And that look reached children themselves quite well.

Future Girl pointed at Y and blurted this out.

"You shall perish four days hence."

"What did you just-?!"





For a while since that day, our Office had become more lively.

Future Girl's approach to work was reliable to unexpected extents.

"Here's coffee." "Tea." "Done with cleaning." "Are these documents OK?" "I delivered it." "This has been left for you, chief." "What's the next job?"

...she was able to help me with jobs so normally it was surprising.

Right, she had had a long life with the caravan, had she.

I could accept how she would be used to doing work as told.

On the other hand, at the same time...

"Se-, sensei~, another defamatory document is making the rounds~. But I investigated the fonts and found that the only machine capable of printing it is the model at your Office~."

...she would also make fake prophecies like those as pranks and, for one, made K-san cry.

"That isn't a defamatory document. It's a prophecy. A prophecy of the end of Kusunoki Village."

So went Future Girl, her chest puffed.

"It had already seen its end, however..."

This is exactly why these new people...

"Tremble with fear!"

"Listen to me..."

First of all, why was she from the future?

I thought that the self-deception of someone in her stage of childhood.

In other words... her self-characterization.

I had reason to think that.

"Why do you say you came back from the future?"

I once asked her that question.

It might have been a mean question with the implication of *"why do you say you came from the future? You could have been from space or simply have super powers"*.

But I believed that dragging out the real self of someone who hid behind escapism required a choice like that. And when I asked,

"Because you see, I really know the future..."

That was had a firm conviction that she was from the future. That tone of hers, like she was speaking an obvious truth, made me hesitate a little.

She really believed that she had come from the future.

But when forced to ask about that future,

"...I don't remember anything. But I've definitely come from the future."

"Did you come back from the future body and all? Or just in consciousness?"

Either of those things appeared frequently in tales.

"...no idea. I wonder which it was..."

"Do you have memories of the past? Back from when you worked for that private caravan as an orphan."

"Those I do have, but I have the feeling that anything farther in the past is what I'm about to experience from here on out."

"You are going to be experiencing your distant past?"

"Also, it feels like... I've already experienced things from the future. But I just can't remember them."

"What if it is just some misapprehension in your brains?"

Future Girl stood up fast enough she nearly tipped off the chair.

"I come from the future, that's certain, absolutely certain! There's no mistaking that! I just don't have any proof..."

The rest of her words dragged into mumbling, and she returned to her sitting posture like a flower wilting.

She had the conviction, but she did not have a clear vision of the future.

Those memories of hers were so intense that she tried her hand at prophesying, but that could only be called vague and inaccurate.

She was repeating the same assertion with such passion that I wanted to investigate it, as well.

I wanted to know about going back through time: a technological possibility.

Whether humanity in the past had scientifically achieved it or not.

I tried to give a cursory search (by browsing on PocMon) to keywords such as wormholes, quantum bubbles, and grandfather paradoxes.

Result... time travel was as expected pretty hard.

There was just nothing else to say but that, right.

"Mister fairy, please build me a wormhole."

"Awwwahn."

"Mister fairy, I want to manipulate time."

"Awwwahn."

"Mister fairy, a time machine."

"Awwwahn."

I just in case tried asking all I could ask, and that was the visible result.

Future Girl's statements were self-delusion: thinking that was the most realistic possibility.

A trend towards the occult that a girl in her puberty would fall for: it was a very convincing theory, one which would make everything easier, and thus one I wished to be true.

But, well, the girl herself said all those things, you see.

I decided to stop bluntly rejecting her and start treating her as if she had really come from the future.

That said, however, it meant that not much would change.

"Sensei, if I may. I'm going back to the poorhouse."

Several months had passed when Future Girl suddenly said that.

"They're very busy right now, too, and I gotta go help."

"...well, I do think that is a good thing."

"Besides, I will be gone soon, so I of course would like to spend my final hours with them.

They're mean little brats, but they're my siblings regardless."

"Huh? What do you mean, final hours?"

"I have a feeling like they are. That's why I gotta *return* to be an adult."

She spoke like she was waking from a dream, like she was giving up.

She could not be having premonitions of her own death, can she?

"Do you feel anything wrong physically?"

"It's not like that..."

"Then go to a doctor and get looked at."

She did not want to, but I persuaded her and forcibly took her to the hospital, but we found no problem whatsoever with her health.

"Sensei, thanks for all you've done."

"Well... do come by to visit once in a while."

"As long as it's in the future."

She left behind words with deep meaning as she returned to the poorhouse.

The day after Future Girl returned to the poorhouse, Patchwork-san visited the Office.

"Sensei, I can report that the child returned safely. Here's a thank you for your troubles."

"My, we have another superlative thing here."

"Woah, a whole roast chicken? What a treat. Thankee."

Y, who had been in the Office without any goal and was just spending time idly, only had pep in her step for accepting the present, and then vanished in the back of the Office.

...it appeared that getting no reward was my lot in this case.

"Sensei, when that girl returned she stopped making prophecies completely. She's also earnestly helping with work, she's like a different person. Just what kind of magic did you use on her?"

"Well, I did not do anything in particular."

"But she became a girl so normal it's shocking..."

So she had. So Future Girl had become a girl of the present.

"To say it specifically, I did not reject her assertion of being from the future."

I also had the feeling that her attitude began to soften little by little when I stopped doing that.

"Ahhh, that's what it was."

Patchwork-san nodded at that, impressed.

"But what decided her return to you was her own judgment. It still somehow felt like a person with a difficult personality deciding to change a week before dying of a disease, however."

"Ah, that's how she feels like now. She even made up with the guys that she used to fight with."

"So, she is in good health. And has a good appetite."

"Sort of like... her measles have healed, and now she's an adult, I wonder?"

"If we are talking about her being from the future and so forth, then that might not have healed yet..."

She may not have been speaking about it with her mouth, but what did she think about it in her heart?

All else aside, Future Girl had either grown or backslid into being Present Girl, and she could now live strongly and lively as a person... or so it would be beautiful to write, you see.

Well, they lived happily ever after, that was what it was.

...indeed, not a tale that has been baked for long enough, was this not?

Truth is, this tale has a continuation. And across a truly long period of time...

Now then.

After that, Future Girl and I came to be acquainted for a really long time.

She would later become a proper employee of the poorhouse, and proactively participated in the work of reality (the present).

She searched for foster parents, conversely took in parentless children, planned charity events, and acted as barker at the bazaar.

This productive lifestyle did not change, not after she got married, not after she had children, not even after she got old.

Even I came to look fondly upon her truly strenuous work.

A long time passed.

This happened when everybody had forgotten that she used to be a prophetess. That was

how long a time passed.

Young people, all of them, pictured their future with uncertain feelings.

I vividly recalled her when she was young, back when she would annoy everyone with her talk about being from the future.

However, a point often came where they were more frequently looking at the past. They fondly re-experienced events that had come, pleasantly retreaded paths they had gone through, things of that sort increased in frequency.

Humans always turn their eyes towards what are to them the more cheerful eras.

When young that would be the future, when old conversely they turned to the past.

Whether those memories were cheerful and fun or not was impossible to tell, regardless, as we had hung together for a long time, I frequently recalled Michelle's (her real name) Future Girl era.

Something always bothered me about that.

People turned their eyes towards their more cheerful ages.

At one point, I suddenly hit upon an idea.

When Michelle became adult, and not only when she was raising babies, but up to when she saw her own children marrying, she had completely lost interest in prophecies and the future. And that was when I suddenly asked her this. Just the one time.

"Say, I understand this comes out of nowhere, but I was wondering, could it be that..."

It was when we were sitting in a Grecian-styled gazebo in the park, unhurriedly drinking tea. She turned her wrinkled face towards mine. I could remember that face even now.

"...your consciousness, unlike that of a normal person, has been subjectively going from the future into the past?"

Michelle opened her eyes somewhat, making a surprised face... or so that was how I saw her.

"It was neither the transfer of body nor the jump of the mind. You consciously went from the future and towards the past... and are you going back in this situation, I wonder... something spiritual, I mean. Given that is difficult to send information from the future into the past, you cannot recall experiencing the future. The Great Wall of Time and Space prevents you from doing so. But as you have the sense that you are advancing *in the past* as you advance through the present, you naturally felt that you were from the future. What do you think of this idea?"

She made a face that I could not categorize as belonging to any of the basic emotions as she stared at me.

My intuition said that, behind that face, there laid a huge swelling of emotion.

"It is so subjective that it might be a simple illusion. But the person herself, you, unmistakably feels that past and future are reversed. Time remains protected, no closed curves occur, not one contradiction appears. What remains is, simply, an orientation of time towards the past. In short, nothing less than a worry that your self is experiencing the future. And that continues even in the present..."

Having finished my speech, I glanced towards her.

I believed that we sat there staring at each other in silence for a very long time.

Eventually, she went,

"It's so hard I don't really get it."

She said that, then burst into a smile.

Old, she at this point supported her physical self with a cane, but it might have been that she mentally supported herself with common sense and reality. Someone like that would never easily cast away what had supported herself. She held precious the reality before her eyes.

"Still, thank you."

What was that a thank-you for, I wondered.

She only uttered those words, then closed her eyes, feeling pleased.

The last time I saw her was when she was literally in her deathbed.

I was watching over her as she had fallen ill.

She had worked long at the poorhouse, so no few people came to her, and talked to her in order.

They were all sad.

However, I did not have much sadness within me.

After all, she had lived long, and could close her eyes in peace.

Eventually my turn to speak came, and I went inside her bedroom.

Not two days had passed since she had lost consciousness and did nothing but sleep, and the bedroom felt crisp, with no humidity to it.

Michelle was no longer able to speak.

On the other hand, all I could do there was to say my last farewell.

I tried to think about words to that regard, but in the end I stood there without having thought of anything. I did not want to use trite words.

A flash of inspiration struck me right then.

I recalled our conversation at the Grecian-styled gazebo and, as I did, felt the words I ought speak promptly flow out of me.

I approached my mouth to this literally old friend of mine.

I found words for her.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Michelle. I shall be in your care from now on and for the next few decades."

I had the feeling that she had made a smile while still asleep.



## The Star Money

Once upon a time, in a land far far away, there lived a very poor fairy.

"I'm so poor."

He was poor, so his clothes were all a patchwork.

"This might be this year's trend."

Though poor he was indomitable, and lived an upright life.

"My favorite dish is cake."

He could not buy any.

He had holes in his shoes, he lacked even a place to live in, he could well forget about cake.

There, a wealthy person passed by.

"How pitiful! I'll give you some bread."

"Thank you sooo much, but... do you have cake?"

"No, I'm keeping all the cake to myself..."

"Ahhh..."

Well, it was expectable.

To tell the truth, he didn't particularly like bread.

"It doesn't feel entertaining, not at all... couldn't he have gone with a donut, at least..."

The fairy walked while venting rude thoughts.

And there appeared another poor fairy.

"Belly's empty. Gonna die."

"Have it?"

The fairy gave up his bread without hesitation. The poor fairy ate in the blink of an eye.

"I'm back to life! What do I do as thanks?"

"Well, should you become rich at some point, you'll gimme money, please!"

A promise to repay a debt should he become successful.

"How much money?"

"Well... for every earning, 5 percent, lifetime."

It was the duty to pay 5% of every earning for life.

That was the requirement he made in exchange for a scrap of bread.



"No problemo!"

Wait, wait, that's not cheap, you know? Isn't this an evil act? Are you sure you want to enter a

compact like that? Awww, too late, he signed it...

"See youse!" "Bai-buh!"

And then, after walking about for a little more, this time he met a fairy shivering at the edge of the path.

"It's so cold."

That fairy had nothing to cover his upper body, so he was shivering in the cold.

"Howdy there, need this?"

"You're so nice!"

The poor fairy gave his tattered clothes to the fairy shivering in cold.

"It's got your body heat, it's sooo warm!"

"The body heat is a freebie!"

Back in the distant past, in a small eastern country, it was said to be virtuous to put one's commanding officer's boots to the chest and warm up of the remainder of their body heat, so it was a freebie along those lines.

"As thank-you...?"

"Well... for every earning (rest abbreviated)."

"So then!, from now on I'll be in your indentured service... sorry... I'll take up a royalty contract with you. We're gonna take things one at a time!"

The contracted fairy made a smile to the poor fairy that said he had been taken in and well, then went to leave.

"See youse!" "Bai-buh!"

The two exchanged a handshake and left.

The now half-naked poor fairy went walking and this time met with an actually naked fairy.

This of course terrified even the poor fairy.

The naked fairy considered herself a girl, which made her tragedy even more real.

"I have to endure the harshness of going no-pan..."

"Gotcha!," and the poor fairy took off his trousers. "Need this?"

"Will you give it to me?"

Incredible, the poor fairy was giving even his last remaining treasure, his trousers, to someone else.

"These trousers are lukewarm, yes!"

"The body heat is a freebie!"

And so the poor fairy was completely and utterly broke.

Was a sad death all that was left for him?

No, that was not the case.

~~What happened was that the royalty contracts he had entered thus far brought him a massive amount of zero-labor profits. It was a situation similar to that of a queen ant with her worker-ants. The ones who succeeded in this world weren't those who earned money, they were those who found a trick to make money and~~

God, who had been watching his sacrifices until then, saved the poor fairy by turning the stars into money for him!

The poor fairy was now a rich fairy.

And he lived happily no matter where he was.

"I took care of just the ending!"

He felt that he should've maybe hidden the contracts he'd made on the way, still, he lived happily ever after.

## The Musicians of Bremen

Once upon a time, in a land far far away, there lived a fairy that had the face of a donkey (Donkey hereafter).

"Work hard, work hard!"

Donkey had been, until then, kept as a domestic animal by a human.

It was no easy life. He was burdened with a heavy load.

However, one day he was able to free himself from his yoke.

Yes indeed:

he had successfully escaped.

A reason why came to him when his masters held this conversation.

*This donkey just doesn't do much work anymore. What he's got, however... it's meat, and...*

He totally didn't understand human words, though, him being a donkey and all.

But at times like these he could understand.

If he didn't do something, then something really bad was going to happen to him. That's what he felt like.

And because of that, Donkey escaped.

"Managed to escape, all's happy!"

But Donkey had run away without any plan, so he did not know where to go.

"Nothing to do but follow this road!"

The street led far to the north.

"Well, aren't you a dog?"

"Please take good care of me!"

A fairy with the face of a dog flew at him from the side.

"My owner was so into cruelty to animals, I couldn't stand it!"

"I getcha!"

They got along well as fellows from similar environments.

The two kept heading north.

On the side of the road there was a fairy with a cat's face. The cat was in high distress as he attempted to remove his collar.

"Are you a friend too?"

"Didn't like my owner's face, so I hurt him."

"Gotcha!"

He was yet another friend animal ill-treated by his owner.

"Where're you going?"

"Bremen."

"Let's go together."

"Goodie." "Goodie."

They decided to go to Bremen together.

They progressed another bit.

"Cluck cluck!"

"Wanna go to Bremen together?"

The chicken was grooming himself, so this time it was Donkey who invited him.

"I wanna! Five more minutes and I'd be succulent meat, so!"

It was a matter of great urgency.  
And so the four little animals came to head for Bremen together.  
Now that they were a larger group, they had to decide a common destination for their travels.  
"What about a band? We'll have our great debut, all delish!"  
"That's so good!" "Let's do it, let's do it!" "I'm on harmonica!"  
They were going to Bremen and play in a band. What a marvelous idea they had.  
And so the four walked north, but it became night so they had to take a rest.  
"Got nothing to eat!"  
"Same here!"  
"Look, there's light over there!"  
The four little animals discovered a house that felt nice built in the middle of the woods.  
And peeking into the windows, what did they find but a large number of fairies having a sweets party.  
"There any way we can have some?"  
"What about showing them something of our art?"  
"Like!"  
Following Dog's proposal, the four planned a surprise entrance.  
"We'll attempt our Major Debut, attract them with song and performance arts!"  
"Like!" "Like!" "Like!"  
Cat's tweet got three likes. It was decided.  
They were going to stake their victory on song and performance arts. There was nothing else to do!  
The four little animals promptly began talking about what constituted the best performance art.  
"Dance!" "Lame."  
"General elections!" "Mediocre."  
"Handshake party!" "Give me money!"  
They brainstormed, but weren't really blessed by any good idea.  
Chicken said this.  
"...a pyramid?"  
"Like!" "Like!" "Like!" "Like!" "Like!"  
He got 175 likes.  
They had settled on a pyramid.  
Dog on top of Donkey, Cat on top of that, and finally Chicken on top of all of them... and that made a pyramid.  
"You all ready?"  
That was how the four were like as they shouted (sung) in unison and charged into the house.  
"Tah-dah!"  
The party became a mess.  
"Demonic beasts are attacking!" "Monsters!" "Ha-ni-wah!"  
The fairies ran pell-mell, scattering like little spiders.  
What remained were just the four little animals of The Pyramids (band name), a house with no one in it, and a mountain of sweets. I said 'just', but what was left was enough, you know?  
It was good for them, still...  
"...this ended up as a real problem!"  
However, with a mountain of sweets before them there was only one thing the four little animals could do.

"Delish-ish!"

And so it was that the four enjoyed from the bottom of their hearts the very first sweets party of their lives.

Ten years later...

A horse was walking down the street.

Of late, his owner has been making noises about wanting to have horse meat at some point, so, dejected to the end, he decided to run away from his ranch.

He had an idea of where to go.

He was thinking of visiting his old friend Donkey.

Horse and Donkey were pen pals, as well as fellow ungulates. He thought Donkey would definitely and warmly welcome him.

Donkey was playing in a band in Bremen. It had been the tenth year since their debut, and he said that they were very popular over there and all.

Horse was really looking forwards to meeting Donkey.

But as it happened...

As he was around halfway through his voyage, a giant beast of a creature (considering he was a horse) flew at him from the woods and Horse soiled himself.

"W-, wha? Whaaa?!"

Sweet of temperament, weak of nerves.

The beast of a creature had a figure that he'd never seen before, as a shape it resembled a pyramid.

"WE ARE STARVING. GIVE US WHAT YOU HAVE!"

The creature said that with a terrifying voice that used a voice changer, but Horse still felt like he knew that voice.

"Excuse me!"

"WHAT?"

"Are you perhaps The Donk?"

"WHAT, BUT IF YOU'RE SAYING THAT... NO WAY, ARE YOU OL'PAL HORSEY?"

The two had previously had a meeting in the offline world, and were friends enough that they called each other by nickname.

The creature took off the cloth that he was wearing on his head.

In the pyramid formed by the four little animals, his friend Donkey had the role of lowest level.

"I just knew it! And you know, I quit being a farm animal!"

"That's to be celebrated!"

Donkey shouted that with happiness.

"Still, how come you're here? I thought you were in Bremen!"

"...ah, well, you see..."

Donkey averted his eyes, looking awkward.

"What about the band?"

"...aWhn..."

Donkey averted his eyes even further. He nearly faced the other way.

"What about your band in Bremen?"

"...there was an age when we were one..."

Horse was taken aback.

This was a problem that Donkey had never mentioned...!

He understood that. Understand he did, however he couldn't stay without asking.



"...and... the music?"

Donkey, in his letters, was always talking passionately about music. To Horse, Donkey's life was music.

Then why did he find someone like that at the side of the road?

The four little animals were fidgeting as they avoided looking at him in the eyes.

"Well, what about the music? What happened to your musical dream?"

Donkey, bathed in persistent questions, gave Horse eyes like a dead fish's.

"...we've... given up music."

"What...?"

"The letters were kind of a lie."

"What? What?"

"...well, look at us... at me..."

That face...

It was an aged face, one with deep darkness to it, one that a person with a young life and a goal to them could never even imagine.

Only someone who was crushed by reality, their dream failed, only they could show a face like that.

"...I see..."

Horse had no more need for words.

Horse, himself, had suffered pains in working as a domestic animal. Even without words he could understand.

"Ol'pal Horsey, if you want, then... we could band together? As band-its."

"What.....?"

And so the five little animals lived forever in happiness as a monster that ransacked the streets.

And they all lived happily ever after.



## Hansel and Gretel

Once upon a time, in a land far far away, there lived two siblings called Hansel and Gretel. The two were very pleasant, kindhearted, and innocent children. Alongside their father and stepmother, the four lived together, but their life was one of poverty, and they spent their days unable to even purchase cake.

"I am so very hungry..."

With this kind of hunger, the stepmother maybe chose the wrong person to marry. Just what would they need to do to be free of this suffering, she wondered. And so she thought.

Then, one day, she had an idea. Right, if only she didn't have two children she wasn't related by blood to, we would have a little bit more for me, right?

It was certainly not a nice idea to have, but inspiration didn't choose the occasion.

(...what if I erased Hansel and Gretel?)

But in that regard, Hansel and Gretel inferred their stepmother's idea and,

(That ain't gonna happen, right bud?)

And they very eagerly attacked the whole prospect, I'd say.

However, it appeared that, being all too innocent, they failed to triumph in intra-familiar politics, and they were left stranded within the woods as per their crafty stepmother's plan.

"Looks like we got abandoned." "You gotta respect an antagonist like that, right."

As they were unable to find their way home, as well as lacking anything to eat, the two were really in a pinch.

Left alone they would be eaten by some beast, of course.

"Did we do something wrong?"

"What if it's just fate?"

"If it's fate then there's nothing to be done."

"What a nice world this is!"

They were innocent, so they couldn't even hate their stepmother.

What truly nice siblings.

"Then should we combine strengths and overcome this hardship?"

"Can we?"

The two took hand in hand and set out to walk.



And so they came to wander about the woods for two days with neither drinks nor food.

"...now that I think of it, our stepmother was wrong, actually, what do you say?"

"...I also feel like that."

How amazing.

Those two days of starvation and thirst, occasionally beset by beasts, had changed the two. It was pitiful that they would be discarded as unnecessary, their dignity trampled. Though belated, they couldn't but feel regret.

And it was right then...

"Ahhh, there's a house!" "Are we saved?"

Were that a mere mountain hut, then this would've ended with the two merely saved.

But that was no mere house.

"This house is made of sweets... isn't it?"

"What? No way..."

Roof of chocolate, walls of biscuit, windowpanes of candy: it was a house made of nothing but sweet things, where every built part was built out of sweets.

"AhWahAhWah..."

"AhWahWah..."

Why was there a house made of sweets within the woods?

A sweet, very sweet scent drowned out that question.

Hansel and Gretel could stand no more and rushed at the house.

Then the door opened and an old woman of kind looks came out.

"Ohmmmy, welcome!"

"T'ohYah!"

Hansel made the old lady eat a pile driver.

What was once a kind-looking old woman was now nothing else of some work of art, sunk as she was into the ground up to her waist.

Now, don't go saying he did a bad thing!

He was so hungry that his powers of reasoning had waned. If this had gone to trial, he would've gotten a Not Guilty verdict.

The two once more set to greedily devouring the house of sweets.

"Delish!" "Salty!"

As an aside, the kind-looking old lady was actually a mean old lady.

She was thinking of grabbing the children, baking them into pies, and eating them. That was because children pies were the very best.

That's why the preemptive attack on the very moment of their meeting was, in the end, all right.

We could even call it the best decision.

"I'm stuffed!" "I am bursting!"

The siblings had eaten enough sweets and were satisfied.

They had never eaten these many sweets before.

They learned for the first time the superlative flavor of eating a stick of biscuit with a chocolate overlay on it.

And the house of sweets remained almost entirely standing.

It was good for living in, it was good for eating.

Which all means...?

"Happy end!" "Awright!"

With this, there was no need to return to their former home.

The two decided to live in the house made of sweets.

Despite being made of sweets, it had a livable interior and running water, and even came with floor heating.

It had even a fairly large oven. It appeared big enough to bake pretty large pies in.

The two made chocolate pies in the oven and ate them. Well, they had as much as they liked as far as ingredients.

"Living like this we might lose our health!"

"Then it's fine even if we lose it!"

The reason the two were no longer nice laid elsewhere.

It was the treasure.

"It's all shiny!" "It's precious!"

There was a mass of coins and precious stones hoarded under the floor of the house of sweets.

"...this is the start of an impressive second life!"

"Then do we have a go?"

"We might as well, I guess!"

The two headed towards the city with the treasure.

There they bought a chocolate factory, put chocolate toppings onto stick biscuit and sold them as an original sweet. They of course copyrighted it.

And it was a big hit.

Then...

"I guess strength is justice!" "We wrested it away!"

If you want something, then go and take it:

Hansel and Gretel seriously thought that at the highest floor of a high-rise (privately owned by them).

As for that stepmother, well, after that she still lived in destitution and later died of disease.

Hansel and Gretel's surviving father still received living expenses from them, and it's said he lived in modesty.

And they all lived happily ever after.

## The Troll Hunter's Pleasant Hunting Life

This tale took place in a remote village in between mountains.

Things were quite inconvenient in that land.

The sea was far away, and far from where the largish road that the city sat upon led, too.

Even the caravan only went as far as their stop alongside the main road, so the people of that land had no choice but to go all the way up the road to them.

It was truly hard to live in that land.

At that point no more than a few dozen households remained in that village, and even further unlucky events were about to crush them.

Right.

...I speak of trolls.

That village had a UN branch office.

It was a land of few people, therefore they were still looking for staff to recruit.

Which meant they could not expect specialists and, what else to say, it seemed that they had a role of consultation and intercommunication. They mediated communication from the villagers to the UN, sorted out the necessary documentation, the like... that was their job.

The former manager was said to be an elderly gentleman, but he vanished at some point...

that was something that happened often... and now a girl named Bonnie was taking the role of assistant.

Bonnie was seventeen.

Hair was neither too long nor too short.

Glasses well suited her, between Order and Chaos she unhesitatingly followed Order, that was the type of girl she was.

And it was Bonnie who heard the scream of a villager as she was about to doze off in her office at night.

"We got a troll! Another troll has appeared!"

A beat later and she could hear the shrill sound of a siren. It was a troll warning.

"...good heavens."

Bonnie shuddered.

Another troll!

She took in hand the shotgun that hung on the wall. It was an old thing, but it was still working, and still had four shots left to it.

She rushed out of the office and ran towards where she had heard the voice.

"It can't be...!"

What Bonnie saw where she was headed was her village being wrecked and demolished.

Buildings had been punched into dust, trucks had been tipped over. As the granary's silos had a big hole opened into it, the freshly-harvested sugar beets were spilling out.

Those beets were the raw materials for sugar. And sugar production could have been said to have been the sole and only lifeblood of the village.

And the silos containing that cornerstone of theirs had been torn open.

"A troll... this is unacceptable!"

The flame of anger burned bright in Bonnie's chest.

Sugar beets were the product of everybody's hard work.

And that had been spoiled. She could never forgive the trolls for this.



"Bonnie! The troll's still in the silos!"

She heard the voice of the village's mayor coming from somewhere. However, she could not see him. He had to be hiding.

Bonnie would never hide.

She was, for better or for worse, UN staff.

Bonnie took a stance with her weapon and approached the hole punched in the guts of the silos.

In the darkness she saw the figure of a massive someone crawling about.

She pointed the readied gun at the darkness and approached, one step after another, to a distance where her shot would not miss.

Bonnie shifted her location, prudently searching for a place where the faint light of the stars shone into the silos. It was so she could see whom she was facing.

Trolls were vulnerable to light.

That being said, lighting them up was dangerous. It made the opponent agitated. If that caused them to run it would be an issue, if that caused them to rage it would have been even more dangerous.

And then she managed to faintly see the back of the troll that was lurking in the silos.

It was a giant with fur red as blood, and had a triangular cap like a pagoda.

His height looked like between three and four times as tall as an adult man.

That was still among the smaller ones, so she was surprised.

"...a Norskyule."

That was the name of the troll that had turned the village's peacefulness into a nightmare.

That could not be tolerated.

"...I'll slaughter you."

Bonnie approached the troll from his back as he was eating into the beets and scattering the remains around inside the silos, and squeezed the gun's trigger.

The gun's shot and the troll's hoarse '*hyhn!*' resounded simultaneously.

The troll was clutching at his back as he wildly rushed out of the silos. Looks like that was a hit. But not a fatal wound, and it was visible in his motions how the troll still had plenty of vigor left.

The troll, suddenly well visible in the light of the stars, would have perhaps looked humorous had he been around ten centimeters in height. However, these trolls were so big one had to look up at them, and every time they showed up they always did bad things, they were a disaster on par with typhoons and tsunamis.

"Ngh, one more shot!"

Bonnie faced the rampaging troll and fired a second round.

Though she thought it a hit, the troll had not shed a single drop of blood.

She fired a third, then a fourth time in succession, but the result was the same.

"...so it has no effect. Then why do you hate it that much!"

It was the light.

The round itself did not have much of an impact, but the troll feared the short flash there was when firing.

The troll faced Bonnie.

"Oh no...!"

She had no more shells so she could do nothing but run. She headed for a building made of stone that was used for the village's town hall. That sturdy building was ideal as a place of refuge.

The troll, violently agitated, chased her straight and forwards, but it did not seem likely he would overtake Bonnie, weaving as she was in between the houses.

Bonnie stopped in her tracks when she was a little bit far away from the town hall. She had spotted one more troll clinging to the upper part of the building's masonry. From how he had a peculiar pattern on his back that recalled the fjords, she knew he was called a Nordfjord.

The Nordfjord turned to face Bonnie.

Brass eyes that looked almost molded shone in innocent curiosity, but immediately afterwards he jumped with a lightness very unlike his massive body, throwing himself at her in midair.

Barely a moment after he landed, he ran at her full speed.

The Nordfjord was one size smaller than the Norskyule. Still he was easily twice the size of a human. If she was caught, it was not going to end well for her.

She now had a troll before her and one behind her.

*I'm done*, but just as Bonnie steadied her resolve with that...

A mysterious knight wearing some sort of armor stood in between Bonnie and the Nordfjord.

"Y-, you're...!"

"Close your eyes."

The knight turned just her head to tell Bonnie that.

Her behavior was so calm that Bonnie could only do as told and closed her eyes.

The knight pointed the massive crossbow she was holding towards the troll and fired.

Immediately after there was a loud noise and a flash of light right in front of the troll, and the beast screamed *hWahnh!* and writhed on the ground.

"D-, did you blow him up?"

The impressive might just left Bonnie startled.

"I fired a flash bolt at him that activates after it has flown a specific distance. It has no chance of killing."

The knight loaded the next round with calmness, and this time pointed her crossbow towards Bonnie's back.

"May I have you move to the side?"

Bonnie suddenly turned back to see that the first troll had come up right next to her. The second flash bolt crashed into his face.

There was an intense light.

The Norskyule writhed in pain with a *nooHn!*. Then,

"They're running away..."

The two trolls clambered on top of houses and escaped each in their own directions.

Bonnie sat down hard on the ground.

"Are you all right? You are not hurt, are you?"

"W-, who are you?"

Asked that, the knight hung her crossbow across her back, unhurriedly took off her helm with both hands, and showed her her true face!

"Hello."

It was I.

Let me explain what has led to this.

A petition for help came through the UN from a place called Yanagi Valley, the Valley of the Willow Tree. It mentioned me directly.

.....why?

The petition said that trolls had emerged and that they wished for something to be done about

it, that was what it said.

"What's a troll?"

Y, who had scanned the petition, came out with something belated.

"What, you do not even know that? But trolls are trolls?"

"And I'm asking you, what's a troll...?"

"Whaaat, you don't know that? For a modern person that's a little bit, well..."

Next up it was Curly Hair, who was assisting Y, that made an incredulous face.

Y was treading on eggshells.

"Y-, you all know? Even you, Assistant-kun?"

Assistant-san stopped working on documents and, of course, nodded.

It was a natural thing to know.

"I cannot believe you do not know what a troll is, incredible. You know that you are on par with people who say they do not know what a typhoon is, right?"

"Woah, woah, are you guys working behind my back to make me look bad? A typhoon? Are you kidding me?"

"If there are fairies then there are trolls," went Curly Hair.

"No there aren't! I've never seen one!"

"There totally are, I know it!"

"Are you all saying that seriously? You guys are going crazy! I get it. Truth is you're all trying to take me for a ride... hah, you're trolling me!"

Y was trying to chase it all away with a smile.

"...w-, what's a troll?"

But she failed and made a terribly fearful face.

"Something of the same species as a fairy. However they are much bigger and their disposition is completely different, or, rather, they ought be called calamities..."

"About how big are they?"

"Well... fairly, they should be fairly big..."

"There are differences between individual specimens, but they go from twice the size of a human to the bigger ones several dozen times the size of a human, I have it."

I supplemented Curly Hair's muddled words.

"Them's totally monsters, ain't they. And those things actually exist?"

"Well, the confusion stems from how there have been few instances of sighting of late. But it appears that they were seen more often further in the past."

I did not have any more detailed information concerning trolls. They had been once filed under Unconfirmed Species or Cryptids.

At present, they were considered a Confirmed Species.

It was just that, unlike the adorable little fairies, trolls had neither intelligence nor rationality.

They were creatures with whom one could not converse.

Instead they were entirely instinctive, and it could not be said that humans were safe around them.

They were merely following each their own personality, similar to typhoons and tornadoes.

What was well known was that they were not individual fairies grown larger and transformed into trolls, and could not be filed under the categorization of *sorta fairy tale-esque*.

Rather, the majority of their known appearances were in areas where the fairies were not active.

One theory said that they perhaps appeared naturally, and were seen as a form of calamity.

"...that's all."

PocMon (movement unit installed) dispassionately dispensed the result of her search, then plodded back to the solar battery charger installed in the Office with tarantula-like motions. "I'm 47% charged, you'll please let me blanket myself with warm electricity and let me sleep for another while."

...well, sure, why not. She was so annoying when awake anyway.

"I didn't know. So trolls really exist..."

"At this point they're no longer Unconfirmed Species."

"And that's why you're now going out for a job, it's been a while since last time."

"Reading the petition, that would be that, indeed. Yanagi Valley, then... this may be quite the long excursion, I would say."

"But why are you being requested just because trolls have appeared, onee-san? It's got nothing to do with you, does it?"

Curly Hair tilted her head in puzzlement.

"That is maybe because... I have certification as a troll hunter, nothing else, I believe. I may be the certified person closest to Yanagi Valley, perhaps."

"W-, why do you have that?!"

Right after returning to the Village after graduating from school, I received the necessary training to engage in being a Mediator. It was a part of an exam I had to take, as without it I could never formally become a Mediator. It was called a practical skill test, and among those necessary skills was Troll Hunter.

Look, it was like someone who never meant to become a teacher still getting their teaching license, you see.

It was the same.

"Are you going?," went Curly Hair.

"Hummm. I have been named specifically, have I... I suppose there is nothing to do but to go, is there."

Besides, refusing would leave a bad impression.

Furthermore, like fairies, trolls were not creatures of reality.

It was thought that they were specific magical beings. Their temperament was such that, even if seen frequently, that was temporary, as time passed they would vanish like mist. They were not to be feared. They were only a bit of an annoyance.

They were annoyances and, conversely, they made for practical experience. That was what I decided to think.

"Which leads me to say that I shall vacate the Office for a few days."

Slam, and Assistant-san stood up.

"What, you're leaving preparing the Anti-Troll equipment to me? ...yes, yes, leave it all to me!"

A given, since the weapons and armor for troll hunting were more or less known.

"And we must be coming with... are we?"

Y said that somewhat fearfully.

"You are not. I will go alone on this one."

With the fairies meant as an exception, in times of need I would have done best to travel light, indeed.

That said, Y's obviously relieved face irritated me.

"Riiight. What a loss! I'll cheer you on! Do your best, my girl!"

...fine, fine...

The next day Assistant-san presented me a number of hand-picked pieces of equipment, which put me at a loss for words.

### **Ultra-Destroyer Crossbow "Heaven's Gate" (SSR) /**

A dreadnought-class arbalest for individual use. The legendary weapon said to have been forged by the Norse god Loki, or at least a replica of that.

Besides normal bolts (type: physical), it's capable of firing every kind of special-situation rounds. As physical damage is mostly pointless during a troll hunt, it's generally utilized to fire flash bolts and the like.

The special skill *Gate to Heaven*, granted only by this equipment, grants an accuracy bonus of 15%, as well as the ability to inflict a stronger critical hit when fired at the correct distance. Well hit is well pierced.

...all fine and dandy, but why a name like that when it came from Norse mythology?

### **Anti-Troll Suit "Trojan" (UR) /**

A super-technological armor originally built to fight against grizzlies, or at least a replica of one.

Impact resistant / heat resistant / slash attack resistant / highly confidential, capable of working even in polluted environment thanks to its protective filters.

Equipped with power assistance functionality, so even if, for example, the user is female, usage of all sorts of ultra-heavy weaponry remains possible.

...all fine and dandy, but did they really think grizzly bears were fine to just up and engage in close combat?

"Yeees let's get to woork!"

Assistant-san and the fairy on his shoulder looked at me with faces full of expectations. It was a passionate gaze.

...all of that just meant I now had to use these things.

Yessir, I shall use them. Given how their functions were, well, reliable.

I shall use them, but still...

"And with that sorted out, I may apologize for this exaggerated getup, but I am a member of the UN support staff and will help you on the troll hunt."

"...huh-, huuuh, so that's why all that."

Once we had returned to the building that was being used as UN branch office (it was a normal house), I decided to ask Bonnie for the details.

Though called a branch office it appeared that the majority was made up of Bonnie's personal living space, meaning one could feel how spartan the way she lived was.

Though there were documents there were no books, though there were dining utensils there were no flower vases. Hers was a life of no comforts.

That there did feel like it might have fit with her antiquated way of thinking, or so it felt like...

"Now that you mention it, I did hear that a while ago the former manager petitioned the UN for help, but... is that why you're here now, I wonder."

"It was in the end but a request for a government official to take charge, so that is going to be

the case, definitely."

I (the government official) said that like it did not concern me.

However, trolls were something like typhoons, so while they had to be dealt with as soon as they were witnessed, doing so was not so pressing.

"Now then, please tell me all about these trolls. Am I correct in saying there are two, like in the last outing?"

Bonnie nodded and began talking.

"Since times past, around here... well, I say that, but it's been just four to five years... around here, I was saying, the frequency of troll sightings has increased. And it's not rare that they would appear together, no. And so the people residing here came to gradually take refuge elsewhere, and by now this is nearly a ghost village."

Like typhoons, trolls were supernatural phenomena that, once passed through, vanished without a trace, but having them come multiple times in a row was certainly a calamity even for a world in decline.

"Well then, can you tell me about the village at present?"

"Excluding me we're about eight people, I suppose. The mayor and her wife plus two more families."

Right after she said it, eight people appeared all at once at the entrance and stated this.

"We decided to leave this village."

Bonnie looked astonished as she stood up.

"Whaaat! So suddenly... but why? We did so well in repelling the trolls!"

"But you haven't successfully hunted a single one of them so far, haven't you."

"Ngh..."

*But the last two trolls were successfully chased away by this person!*,

were some of her words of persuasion, but the villagers just shook their heads.

"...we just can't stay. Our harvest was torn through, the livestock gets neurotic when trolls are about, and they even made a mess of our fields. Most of our facilities are wrecked."

Bonnie shut her mouth tight in frustration. After all, what her interlocutor was saying was most pertinent.

"...so you're moving, but where to?"

"We're hunkering down at our relatives'. You should move too, Bonnie, and quickly. See you."

They all left with relieved faces.

Bonnie only watched them go without words.

"...and so right now I'm the only one. The only villager."

"... i-, it does appear you are, indeed."

A terrifying and nastily awkward silence stretched through the room.

"I can't leave. I've got no family living outside of here and no idea of where I'd go. Besides, I must guard the village's more important facilities... for when everybody comes back."

As far as I could tell from staring at Bonnie's face as she said that, it did not seem she would change her mind.

Such earnestness.

"Well then, the request for the trolls to be driven away... is to be considered still in effect, is that what you are saying?"

I was sure she was glaring at me.

"It's still in effect, but if you think it pointless then you can just go back home, thank you very much!"

She took her unloaded shotgun in hand and,

"I'll do it even if I have to do alone!"

That was heroic of her, or danger-chasing as it may be.

"Please wait. What do you think you are going to do with a weapon with no ammunition?

Besides, I did not say that exterminating the trolls was pointless."

"So you will help?"

"More than that, I will be the one who hunts all the trolls, so you are the one who is going to help, if you please."

"....."

Bonnie's eyes were getting damp with tears.

"I thought that people from the UN would be much meaner..."

"Very good. That is the correct way to perceive them."

"...what?"

But while I did not take this mission particularly seriously, it was in my best interest to complete it... it would also make me feel like a load was off my shoulders.

"All else aside, since we are continuing with the troll hunt, may I be a bother and ask for a place to lodge at? I have come here on a forced march, I have not taken even a quick nap."

As I asked for all that I thought I would be sleeping in this branch office with Bonnie, but,

"Then I'll take you to the local hotel."

...they had a hotel?

Yanagi Valley was a tiny village, one that was narrowly carved between two sides of a river. Everything else had been swallowed by nature, and in between tall grass and wild trees there were ruins of places that now no one used anymore, such as a storehouse made of red brick and the smokestack of a power plant.

The hotel was on the other side of the river, so the two of us were walking at a steady pace through the now desolate city center.

"That is one fine iron bridge."

"This iron bridge is tremendously old, and it has aged just as tremendously. It's dangerous so don't use it, all right?"

Bonnie climbed a stony staircase and crossed a bridge of naked timber suspended between the riverbanks.

And so we headed onwards to the bridge's north end.

The population may have dropped down to one, but over here there were still signs of life.

The people now gone had to have lived around here.

In a well-tidied up stone-paved square there was a common cafeteria with a terrace attached that had to have seen use by the locals, and up a leniently sloped narrow path I could see a building that felt like a church.

"With spectacular vistas like these it is a waste that this area is now depopulated."

This land did look like it was visited by tourists.

"Indeed. And once there are no more trolls, I believe people will come back."

Bonnie loved the land she lived in.

But once things had become like this, rebuilding without even the power of magic would have been difficult.

It would be nice if we could manage to compensate for all that, I would also say.

"By the way, Bonnie-san. I see that there are many tiny doors scattered everywhere. What are those?"



Next to the entrances, on the land parts of the bridge, at the roots of roadside trees... there were doors that a pet dog could just about pass through located in places like those.

"Those are said to be fairy doors. They're a custom around here. The saying has been handed down that if you install doors then fairies will come to live there, they're built as a sort of a lucky charm. In the past they actually built small houses, but nowadays, well, the majority are just doors."

"Huh, how interesting. It is a sure thing that having even a small house built for them would make for the secret hideout-like place of the type they prefer."

"They?"

"The fairies, of course."

"Fairies, huh," and Bonnie made faraway eyes. "I wonder if they really exist."

"...huh?"

It felt like my ears had captured something odd.

"Bonnie-san, you have witnessed trolls several times now, correct?"

"And I've fought them several times. No experience of having driven them away, though."

"And despite that, you have never seen a fairy?"

"I heard that they really exist, but seen one with my eyes, well... they're legendary creatures, right."

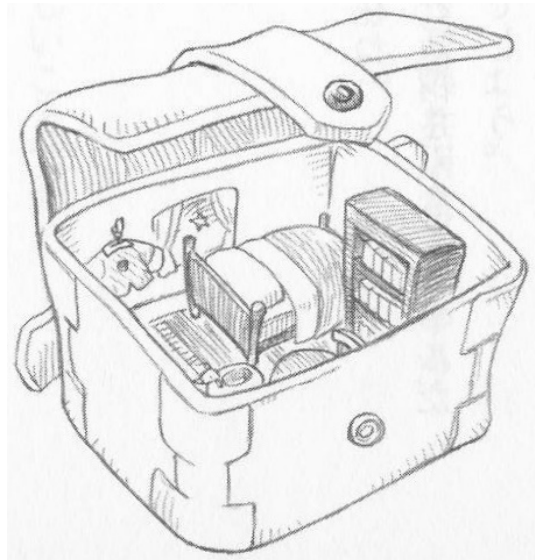
And that meant, I supposed, that Bonnie was on the Never Personally Seen One group, then. Well, one could not conclusively call trolls and fairies equals, and it was understandable that they would be thought as separate creatures.

"Since we have made it this far, I suppose I can show you the real thing."

I knocked on the top lid of my waist pouch. Inside was a room created for use by fairies, and, although cramped, it made for quite the pleasant mobile hotel.

As you are aware it was quicker to carry them Rounded Up, but those pillbug-like things liked to come back and go away unnoticed, so this was better for long-term refrigerator-like conservation. It was temperate and agreeable, so the fairies did not change much, you see.

"...well now, it is empty."



The fairy I had expected to last for long had vanished.

"Do you always carry a dollhouse strapped to your hips, Hunter-san?"

"Well, this is not a dollhouse, you see..."

Though having a tiny bed, bookshelf, and bedpan (usage unknown) crammed into it certainly resembled nothing but a dollhouse, of course.

"Now why did he run away?"

Ever since figuring out this PH (Pouch Hotel) strategy, I never had a transport accident with a fairy, which left me surprised.

As backup I was also carrying Rounded Up fairies.

However, I could not spot even a single one of all those whom I had tossed in my sack.

The fairies had disappeared.

"Hmmm..."

I hoped I did not have to proceed with all of this in a state of Of, however.

"Now then, this is our village's hotel. It's been used as hotel forever, it's a building with a good pedigree. Use it as you please."

I was led to a building made of bricks surrounded by trees.

We entered the lobby and I found that, while not spacious, it had a good, snug coziness to it, it was a good hotel.

"Oooh, how nice! I occasionally sleep in hotels during my jobs, but the majority are ruins, the ones this pretty are rare."

The rooms numbered in less than fifty. They had a cafeteria and a bar and a lounge, all in a width crossable in a single breath. Well, I did prefer my hotels modest and convenient.

"That's good to hear. They keep the place clean, so I'd be happy if you can use this."

Bonnie made a smile of relief.

A girl deeply honest and serious, her.

Earnestly and politely she told me about where the food stocks and the washing towels were, and also inspected the solar powered hot tub. Once the cursory explanation was over, Bonnie even made tea for me in the lounge.

"Mh, this is nice."

"Good to hear."

It actually felt a little off, sure, but criticizing this tea would have been the height of rudeness.

"Now then, back to the troll hunt, the first thing I would like to do is thoroughly investigate. If there is anything that you know, please, make sure to tell me."

"What I know is, actually, nothing much... they come from the woods, that's all..."

"What has been the frequency of their sightings?"

"Well now, about thirty times a year, I suppose."

"Thirty times?! That frequently?"

"I do believe it's that many times, yes. And a few times there's been multiple of them."

"There are far too many!"

"What, there are? Compared to other lands, too?"

Normally, trolls would appear once every few years, if they appeared at all.

I had never really heard of them attacking so incessantly.

"Something strange is happening here, maybe."

"...and with that said, what do we do?"

"I would like to say to leave it all to me, but there are still many things about trolls that are a mystery, you know. I want to investigate at least a little."

"You're a hunter but you're doing an investigation, did they teach you to do this sort of deskwork?"

"Well, I am actually a Mediator, you see..."

"What, but then... you're in the intelligentsia... or rather, you're above my position..."

"Sorry for not being a government stogie..."

"No, that's not... I'm the one who should've..."

The both of us felt dejected.

"Which all leads to how I believe I should be able to inspect the documents that are in this branch office."

"But it's just a branch office... we have nearly no documentation."

"Then what about historical records?"

"We don't have many of those either, I don't think. This job is about giving consultations and sending everything to the main office. There weren't any particular records here since I've been here, not really... the majority of jobs used the body, or rather, the totality, you see."

It was a job in an underpopulated area, I could not blame her, certainly.

"If you have nothing recent, do you at least have older documents? I do not mind if they are from a public library."

Sorry to say it, but... ah, but that's for sure, the library..."

She cupped her lips with one hand, the gesture of thinking.

"We had a library, I think?"

"Where was it?"

"...funny. I can't remember... but I'm sure I went there, way back when."

"Do you not recall?"

"Well..."

I supposed that the memories of one's childhood were vague.

But was it even possible to forget the location of the library of a village so tiny?

"Is the library in an abandoned area, like out in the woods?"

".....I've no earthly clue about that, either."

Bonnie seemed to have sunk quite deep in thought, however she could not remember.

"I'm sure we had one. But... sigh, this is impossible! It's not even on the tip of my tongue."

She said that defiantly, forcefully rising from her slumped-over stance.

She was a serious person, still she maybe oddly preferred peremptory statements, or maybe she was the type that would not think too deeply, or maybe she wanted to first of all move her body whatever came next... a woman of many vulnerabilities, indeed.

"Well, just tell me once you remember. Even ancient newspaper articles could be of relevance."

Lacking pertinent study materials, there was nothing else for me to do but to wait and see how things developed.

This looked like it was going to be a long sojourn.

"Hunter-san, I have sighted a troll!"

Bonnie rushed into my guest room around half past midnight on that same day.

"But the last ones have just appeared... and I had just fallen asleep..."

Chased down from the bunk just as I was sleeping, I wore my armor and followed after her as she took the initiative and rushed ahead. As I walked I finally woke up fully, and noticed that Bonnie, in the stead of a shotgun out of shells, had a new weapon in her hands, a longsword.

"It is not going to work, so please put that away."

"Is it really useless? There were also greatswords, but they were sorta heavy."

Is she perhaps not a little hyperactive for being a daughter of the present age?

"There's lots of anti-troll stuff ready to use as prepared by the staffs across the ages. But none

of them worked, so into storage they went. This is also one of them. The most intimidating things among them are the guns, but now that we're out of ammo..."

"Trolls are beings of magic, so normal equipment will not work on them. But since they by nature avoid the light, flashlights would work better than those antiques."

"A flashlight... feels like they would just get angry from that."

"A strong enough light would work on them, maybe."

I had learned that in class.

The instant we left the hotel we heard a troll howling from nearby.

However, it was dark, and we could not see anything. I activated the night vision device that was standard issue on the suit. It was wonderful, it let me see things even without light.

"You take these simple scopes, Bonnie-san. They will let you see well even in this faint light."

"Oooh, this is amazing, yes! I can see so well."

We spotted our problematic troll right away.

He was alone, and he was studying the city from the woods covering a nearby small hill. Size was about twice that of a human, making it a smaller one. And, of course, he did not look at all like a fairy. But maybe they were beings close in their substance?

...still, well, thinking came later. Now eradication took precedence.

"That's a Nordfjord. Those guys are seriously curios!"

"In short he is something of a vanguard, correct? And I am gonna shoot it~!"

I took a stance with the crossbow and set it to flash bolts.

This weapon, amazingly, landed criticals when striking targets in the 45-55 meters range and hit for three times normal damage.

...I had no idea how.

It was just an annoyance so I ignored it, instead unleashing the bolt when I had gotten to what was approximately the right distance.

It hit. It burst. It was light.

By what process it was unclear, however.

When struck by a light, or when exposed to the light of the sun, trolls instantly petrified and turned to rubble. If the light was weak, they could manage to escape.

And on this occasion, what happened was exactly what the rumors said would happen.

The petrified troll instantly collapsed with loud, rock-y sounds.

"A-, amazing...!"

### **Nordfjord successfully defeated!~**

"...did someone just play a fanfare?"

"It was me!"

...you, huh.

Bonnie put the trumpet she had played like it was no big deal on her back and pumped her fist like she was holding an invisible ball at her chest.

"Well, for now we have eliminated one, right."

"Thank you, hunter-san! This is a remarkable accomplishment! Trolls should all die! Banzai!"

That was certainly some manner of talking...

She took my hands firmly into hers and,

"Let's keep this up!"

Those winner's eyes set behind her glasses were burning with love for her homeland.

"TROOOOOOOLL!"

The next night, too, the troll signal echoed in Yanagi Valley.

Trolls did not like light, so they would only appear at nighttime.

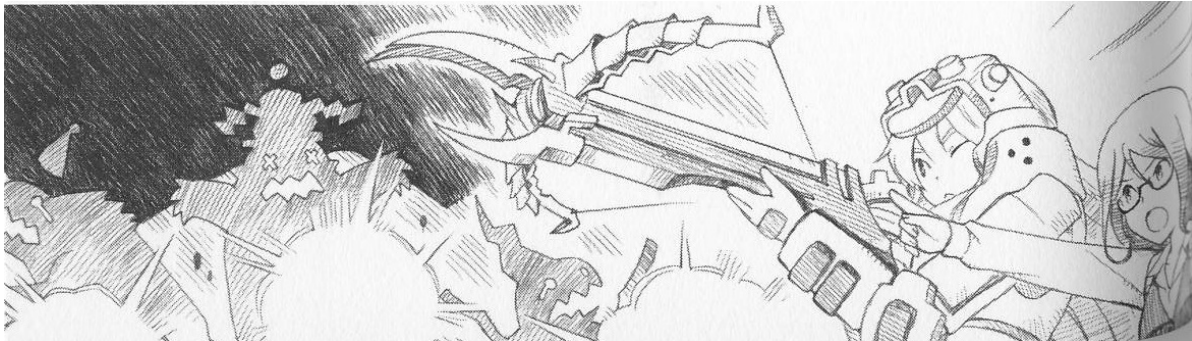
Going out on a hunt while scrubbing sleepy eyes became a daily occurrence.

**Edelkopf successfully defeated!♪**

And ever time I went on a hunt, I defeated a troll.

**Gottnitall successfully defeated!♪**

I defeated them one after the other.



**Wringlefinch successfully defeated!♪**

In practice it was all thanks to my equipment, that I could say.

What else from something that went between the Ultra Rare and the Super Rare.

Now that I am reminded of it, several times after I had shot a troll they left behind materials (?). And I made use of them.

**Ultra-destroyer Crossbow "Heaven's Gate" (SSR+++)** / **Critical Hit +50**  
**Anti-troll Suit "Trojan" (UR+)** / **HP Recovery (minor)**

...indeed, that I did. I powered them up, of all things...

There was, incredibly, a smithy-like place in the village. Though it might have been an automated car production facility.

Apologies if this all seems a little videogame-like.

**Buchtenebrouse successfully defeated!♪**

However, well, for being many the trolls were many.

"Bonnie-san... how many days have I been staying here, again?"

"Hunter-san, there's more over there! Fire!"

I fired as per her instructions.

It hit. It burst. It was light.

*Awwhn*, groaned the troll as it petrified then shattered.

## **Dritosekk successfully defeated!♪**

I had Bonnie blowing into her trumpet for BGM.

"...I could do without that, you know."

"Out of the question! The hunt is to be celebrated!"

"Celebrated, should it..."

As the troll hunt continued, there was one thing I could tell:

and that was that the trolls were reappearing.

In other words, even if defeated, after a fixed amount of time they respawned... they returned.

I could defeat them and defeat them, but they resurrected!

In other words, this job had no end whatsoever in sight. That was nasty, indeed.

"...what if we just abandoned this village?"

"That's so mean of you! This is my hometown, it's where I was born!"

Nice love for your own motherland there.

As long as that persisted, she would never make the choice of leaving.

Awww, if only I had a fairy, then I could solve this spit-spot! For whatever reason, none had appeared ever since that thing back then. I felt lonely.

In their stead, an *had enough yet?* of trolls appeared in rapid succession.

"Also, and I speak of the frequency of their appearances, this is not a rate of thirty times a year. It is about several times that many, am I wrong?"

"You're right in that, of late, trolls have increased rapidly in number. But it's all right! We're on a roll, so as long as we keep exterminating them as we are, at some point the village will be at peace!"

...sooo spirited...

Well, but she was a good kid, mind.

And she was such a good kid that a desire not to betray expectations was her weakness.

"I would like to put an end this life of inverting day with night, however..."

The frequency of troll attacks was far too high, and these were days where I slept with my shoes on at night.

Two days later we were struck with a radical change.

The day I started supplementing my lack of sleep with noon naps, there was a twist.

I believed I had stamina, given I was in my early twenties. With Bonnie in her late teens, we would have been all right even with not sleeping for a month (irrational thought).

"It does not appear that there will be any further attacks today. Let us go back and sleep!"

"Let's do that... oh my, I spotted something good."

A miniature book had fallen down from somewhere.

It was the Item Drop of a troll I had just defeated.

Anything I could not use for strengthening my tools could be considered a consolation drop, but...

It was a miniature book. That was good.

"Looks hard to read..."

"What are you talking about. It was written in a typography!"

There were few things describable as cultural around Yanagi Valley. The population was too scarce for that.

And that was why I avidly began reading this tiny-sized document!

Awww, if only we had a library...

"I did read miniature books often back when I was a child, but wow, were they ever this small. In the past they were printed much bigger."

Bonnie had let an important scrap of information slip out of her.

...mh-hm.

"When you were a child, then, but where?"

"That was in the library... or, well, so I think."

"And the location of said library?"

"I told you that I can't remember! And that's despite how, truly, way back when I had frequented it often, wherever it was."

"At the very least, then, we can say that that library has at the very least miniature books inside."

"Yeah... that's for sure... you're a sharp one."

Conversely, Bonnie at present had nearly no interest in reading.

And all with a face that said she was an avid reader!

Yes indeed, there was something off there.

"Please hurry and remember. If we could find the library, we could obtain information on trolls that has been handed down from this land's more ancient times."

"Ngh, I'll try hard... still..."

She grasped her head.

We opened the miniature book at the hotel.

Written in it was a simplistic fairy tale.

A mysterious boy born of a fruit slays a man-eating demon and brings back a treasure... that was it for the tale.

I had little information about this fairy tale, so I did not know, but there was no mistake that this was a famous tale in some land far, far away.

...and still, its finale had a twist.

After the slaying the boy became rich, and the man-eating demons turned out to be a group of vegetarians. Because of that, later there was a continued and protracted violent strife between the demons and the boy's family, and that was how the tale ended.

That sounded familiar to me, somehow, and it did follow the trend I set when I wrote for the anthology back when I was a student.

It was like it was throwing my past self's narrow-mindedness back at me, it was a little bit harsh.

But they liked this sort of stuff, indeed, the fairies did...

Yet what had to be there was not.

And, of course, there was a clear reason for that.

**Ultra-destroyer Crossbow "Heaven's Gate" (UR+) / Critical Hit +120 / Hit Rate +15%  
Anti-troll Suit "Trojan" (UR++) / HP Recovery (minor) / Evasion Rate +10%**

Well, what a happy miscalculation that was.

My Heaven's Gate had evolved into an UR (Ultra-Rare).

This was almost stupidly powerful. It easily hit even when fired from quite the distance, wherever it hit was a critical hit, and I did not feel like I could ever be defeated.

The reason being that, when equipped, it seemingly to give me the same bonuses even when attacking with bare hands, and I could even shatter stones with a single punch.



It was just, well... continuing to feed them with raw materials was a fair bit of a problem. Particularly when it became UR, because to add a single + one came to need even more rare materials. And an even greater mass of rare materials was required for it to become +++... I felt my consciousness fade away.

Troll hunt & pick-up drops → gather materials together → work on the weapons → troll hunt

So went the endless loop.

Though, while that was work, it was easy to get absorbed in it, indeed.

"Say, what about this improvement next? Take out the evasion rate upgrade and install the skill to double the speed of aiming the weapon. Won't this be better for your efficiency? It's gonna take ten Superior Troll Fangs, though."

Bonnie looked so alive as she proposed upgrades that I was taken back.

"...say."

"What is it? Don't need to aim?"

"No, speeding up aiming speed would be convenient, but... it is not about that, are we not inverting the means with the objective here?"

Bonnie was taken aback when told that.

"But I see us as happily taking on the hunt. Besides, even when we're not attacked, you also go around gathering materials, don't you?"

"That is not my main objective, I am searching for something... I just end up finding rare materials while I am. And I am taking them just because they happen to be there. Even if, say, I do not need them right away. Is that not what a human would do?"

"T-, that's for sure..."

"If you find anything rare, then do let me have a look. ...no, that is not the point. Though troll extermination is our objective, we are all eagerly looking forwards to the next attack, what do we think we are doing here?, that is what I am talking about. We are not fighting in order to improve our rare equipment. Our goal is to utilize this rare equipment to exterminate the trolls!"

"But trolls always respawn... at least around here."

"And that is bizarre!"

And that was why I wanted to inspect past records regarding trolls. There was certainly something that we were missing.

However, there was not even a convenient document archive here in this branch office.

I could investigate the houses, being that Yanagi Valley had a population that had reduced daily, but as the rate of literacy was not high in this village, there were a startlingly few literary records left.

On that, Bonnie could just about read, but she was terrible at writing.

It would be impressive if she took a mere five hours to write a single missive.

...so how come she wears glasses?, was what I wanted to make fun of her for.

Right. There was something I was looking for: the forgotten library.

If my hunch was right, that may have solved the mystery of this bizarre situation.

Except having Bonnie remember would be faster than searching for it myself...

I stared hard at her and Bonnie went, *ah!*, with a loud voice.

"Did you remember?!"

"What, what are you talking about? The library? No, I didn't... but there was something rare, yes. I found it yesterday in a house. I wanted to give it to you, but I forgot until now."

What she produced after saying that was a miniature book.

"My! It is Don Quixote!"

It was a famous work. It was unbelievable that it would be found in miniature book form!

"I always wanted to read it."

"I have a bit of fond memories of this."

Don Quixote was the comedic tale of a band of knights.

The tale was about Quixote, who was convinced he was a mighty knight, traveling to various countries. It was taken as a tale of fiction, but there were some that said it was actually based on a real person who managed a retail store known for its surprisingly cheap prices.

"I am looking forwards to reading this. Bonnie-san, you really like reading, do you."

"When I was a child I did, yes. I really read a lot when I was going to the library every day..."

"Do you not find there are books you wish to read now?"

Bonnie's shoulders slumped.

"I'm seventeen now, you know? An age where it wouldn't be surprising if I had kids already, so reading a fairy tale like that, really..."

"....."

...right. I supposed they married early in these lands. That happened often, it did.

Still, I was a little bit surprised.

"I've had a job since I was a child, see. I've outgrown made-up tales, yes."

"It is not a given that just because you have a job you cannot live a life of culture. If you like to, then you should read however old you might get."

"That might be true, but I don't have books to read."

Bonnie made an ambiguous smile.

...I had the feeling that she was maybe just saying that to save face with me.

What she really meant to say was what she said a moment ago.

Outgrown... right.

She would never say it out loud, but she might consider made-up stories to be silly.

"Do you have any hobby? Or something you want to do, or dreams, the like."

"A dream of my future, I really never experienced one. And more importantly than that, I must solve the troll problem and return the village to the way it was."

"...I see."

But it was not certain that the inhabitants would return should even the trolls be exterminated.

In that case, then Bonnie would come to live alone in a village with no one else. In a land where even the fairies did not appear.

...and what was I going to do about that?

"There you are."

During the day, Bonnie was tending the vegetable garden and going around to survey the houses and facilities she had been charged with minding, so I came to frequently wander around on my own.

I was just walking about the woods when I did, but I happened to find it.

...it was a fairy door.

A fairy door, one of the countless around Yanagi Valley, a decoration peculiar to this land.

They expected fairies to live there, so they installed tiny doors. But in truth, actually making an interior would take time and effort, so I rarely saw those in actuality. Besides, once made, there was no way of managing who came inside.

For humans, that was.

That door was affixed to the roots of a conspicuously fine, large tree roughly at the entrance of the woods.

It was a much larger type of fairy door, at least among those seen in the village. Beyond it, made by carving the inside of the tree, laid a library.



I could not get inside, size being the problem.

Thinking just from the size of the door, it seemed to be a fairly vast library.

But as it was built on the inside of a tree it would not be particularly big, though given the tree was big it was a well hollowed-out hole, with all of the space within consumed by bookshelves.

And then there were books in those shelves... and all were miniature books. That was how the library was.

"Hellooo?"

Just in case I hollered out, but it did not seem like anyone would come out.

But the conditions of the interior was good, and lamps flickered inside at fixed intervals, so it was clear that there was someone making daily use of it. And even then I could feel many tiny presences hiding themselves all through the interior.

Why were they not coming out?

That was because, maybe, they were terrified.

By what, or by whom?

I believed this may have been obvious so this might be pretentious to say, but it was of Bonnie.

When I returned to the branch office I found Bonnie returning after she had finished working the vegetable garden.

"Which all leads me to say that I realized that you have the talent. Maybe."

"W-, what's with that out of nowhere?"

Perhaps she was vulnerable to being complimented, because Bonnie's eyes became moist in embarrassment.

"I should have said talent as a Mediator, perhaps. You unmistakably have the personality for it. Maybe."

"Maybe... you say?"

"Likely maybe."

"First time I've heard someone so full of confidence use a maybe like that... still, what do you mean with 'talent as a Mediator'?"

"That would be hard to explain in a few words, you see."

It was actually something that could be explained with a single specific word, but I avoided it as it looked to me that, if I were to use that term, my interlocutor's attitude would harden.

Come now, you know which one, it was that marvelous phenomenon that started with M. The dodginess of *its* impression, how suspect *it* was, was why the thing took the name of *that*, as you know.

Right, every one of us could use *that*. Though only of late has humanity gotten fully accustomed to using it.

That was why even Bonnie being able to unconsciously use *that* was nothing that could be reduced to a dream. Particularly for a woman like her, who had outgrown fairy tales and made the tough decision of living firmly in reality.

And that was why I was careful with my terms, that was all.

"...this may come to be an abstract way of putting it, but it is something like the ability to influence your surroundings, I would suppose."

"Influence, I see. As far as I have lived, however, I've made no conscious use of that."

"That would be more like influence towards other people, correct? What I am talking about is more, well... like *that*, that is what it feels like."

"Like *that*."

"In other words, you have a personality possessed with the ability to strongly influence fairies! Maybe!"

Bonnie seemed a little taken aback.

"Do... I?"

"You do, Bonnie-san, because you take a somewhat fierce attitude to things. I believe this frightens even the fairies. Right, you said you did not even want to see a fairy, correct?"

"Well, it's not like I don't want to see one, it's just that I haven't seen one yet... a-, am I really that scary? Am I the type that scares people?"

"Fairies just do not handle well the waves you emit. On that account, do you not wish to put a full stop to this computer game-like endless reappearance of trolls?"

"...whaaat?"

Bonnie made a face like she was utterly and hopelessly confused.

"...I remember. Vaguely, but I'm sure that I remember this place. This here is the library I used, yes."

Bonnie peered into the library in the woods and was frozen in place for a good minute. After that she lifted a pale face and whispered that with a low voice.

She seemed quite confused, as if ancient memories had resurfaced at once.

"Are you all right?"

I put a hand on her shoulder and her shivering reduced just a little.

"I... have lost my parents early, so when I was a child I always played alone. And that was how I found this place... and this is where I read all those books."

"When you were a child you could fit in a door this small, correct?"

She nodded just barely, and pressed her hands hard on her face, like she was restraining something... perhaps the memories of a time of sadness... that was the gesture she was making.

And I expected that she, at her age, would have come in contact with the persons responsible for making this library, the fairies.

Time then passed, Bonnie became too big and could not enter the library anymore, and would have likely felt that she was being excluded. Then at some point she had forgotten those memories, and here we were.

Bonnie eventually regained her composure and went,

"Yes, what a shock. That I could forget something so thoroughly despite not having amnesia, I mean."

Ahahah, she laughed dryly.

Caressing her head made her just a little bit happy, and I sort of came to feel her like a younger sister I wanted to protect. ...or, at least, there would be someone back in Kusunoki Village who would be angry were I to put it like that.

"Still, how does this all connect to the extermination of trolls?"

"What causes trolls to attack is, maybe... erm, that is... the power of *that*, you see."

"The power of *that*."

"You could also call it the power of influence or of peculiar characteristics."

"The *that* which would also be my talent, I see."

"Exactly. It becomes easy for fairies to like a person when their power of *that* is strong. And that is why I expect you to truly have the makings of a fairy, Bonnie-san. But since you have *vigorously* outgrown things such as fairy tales, you restrain the multiplication of fairies.

However the power of *that* which occurs around you remains high in density, and explodes in a different direction like a volcano erupting."

"Trolls."

We could even sort of surmise the reason why they never appeared during the day.

Because it was something that burst out suddenly, but was born in an environment of restraint, it became massive. Because it easily became something hair-raising for people to experience, it became a monster, like the sort that was a giant Unconfirmed Species.

Fairies were weak to electromagnetic waves, and since they were similar to them, this caused the trolls themselves to be weak to luminescence.

"Therefore, the means to exterminate the trolls is simple. The source of the power of *that*, which is us, needs to go elsewhere. Well done. Re☆Solved!"

"....."

...what a sour look, hers.

"Disagreement to the MAX, I see."

"There's no way anyone would be happy when told to abandon their own land!"

"I am not saying to abandon it. Just to leave it be. So that it can be forever be flourishing within our minds."

"That's just putting it nicely!"

People from a land generally had this silly-strong love for it, indeed...

"Burdened by you as well as me, the power of *that* becomes saturated in this land, you see.

Normally fairies go back and forth between gathering and scattering, which makes the environment suitably protected, but a peculiarity of this land represses that avenue of venting. You know how it goes, when the number of birds decreases the insects, their predators gone, grow in massive numbers, do they not. The outburst of trolls is also the same. Our presence is damaging to your homeland."

"Bwaaah! I don't want to believe it!"

"Well, I do think that if you could at least believe in fairies a little bit more, then that damage may be mitigated."

Bonnie contemplated.

"...that's just impossible! I can't believe something I've never seen before!"

"Do not be so dense!"

She was the type that would assert she did not believe in ghosts, but would then break into tears should she ever see one.

"But, you know, I really don't want to!"

"It is no longer the time for you to say things like that!"

It appeared that a harsh verbal quarrel was about to start.

"My, what's that you're doing? Is that zazen or something?"

"I am indeed in meditation."

I came out in the square in the center of the village to take some surreptitious hard measures.

"Meditation... about what?"

"No need to even say it. It is about preparing for tonight's troll hunt."

"What, so you are continuing it?"

Bonnie's eyes were damp.

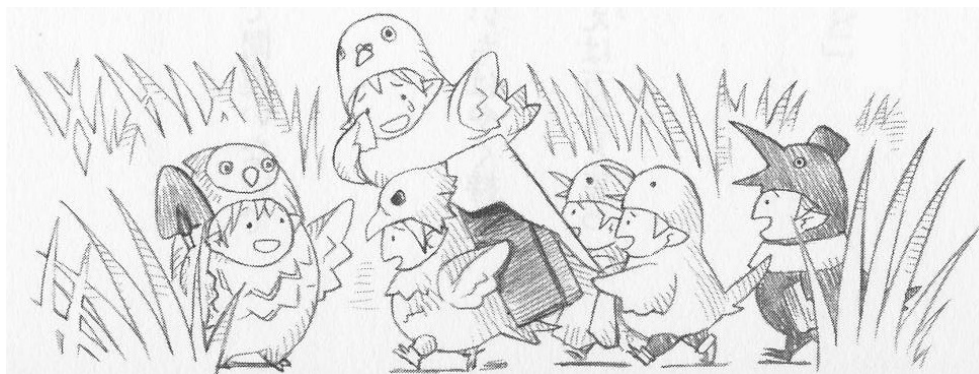
"That is obvious, is it not. The two of us must protect the land."

"But after that fight we had... thank you! I'm so happy!"

A Hug of Friendship occurred.



I had been terribly cold towards her, when she had been so overflowing with emotion.  
 "...by the way, Bonnie-san. I know I am changing the subject, but am I mistaken if I say that the regular day of visitation by the caravan is tomorrow?"  
 "You're not. We can restock on supplies. We can hunt for a few more months!"  
 ...like I was going to keep the hunt going for that long.  
 "Also, did you put together the valuables? So we can bring them out faster when trolls attack."  
 "I have. I prepared a bag with valuables just like you told me to, yes. There's valuable clothes, food, and water. You can be sure that it's got a good enough assortment of things."  
 "That is more important than anything. Heh heh heh."  
 "...you just laughed a little bit darkly right there... what's the problem?"  
 "What? I-, I did? Maybe it is just your imagination?"  
 And so I ended up being told that the way I laugh was dark, of all things.  
 "Maybe it was? Well, whatever. Say, more importantly, I think this is me misperceiving something, but..."  
 "But?"  
 I bit.  
 "I'm absolutely certain that I'm mistaken, but... when I was walking alongside the river a little bit earlier..."  
 "Earlier, yes?"  
 I bit very eagerly.  
 "...there were robin birds making the row of a funeral procession."



"Then someone has to have killed a robin."  
 "They vanished past some grass right away, but... that was a trick of the light, right?"  
 "A trick indeed, certainly."  
 "R-, right, right," and Bonnie made a relieved face. "I'm gonna go home now, what are you going to do?"  
 "I am going to deepen my meditation a little bit longer."  
 "Right. Don't push yourself too hard, OK? I have a feeling that they'll show up again tonight."  
 Bonnie waved her hand and left.  
 "...and they will appear, indeed they will."  
 This has been the second day since I had begun meditation. I concentrated pretty hard, and I believed the power of *that* had to have increased as well.  
 And still it left Bonnie all confused like that.  
 That was how much strength she had used to close her consciousness away from anything fairy tale-like, you see.

And then, that night, a swarm of trolls attacked Yanagi Valley.

"Too many too many too many too manyyy!"

"Myyy, this is a problem. Let us withdraw for now!"

We scrambled to escape the village.

Running and running down the streets at night, we moved to where the caravan had been parked. Thanks to my suit, I did not consume stamina.

With dawn nearby, we lit a fire in the deserted parking place and waited for morning.

"Happily enough, it appears that we were not chased, were we."

"W-, where would a number that high of them..."

"It is a volcanic explosion due to a situation of saturation, as I said. Welll, of course even I was surprised to see massive trolls taller than 50 meters. If we were to convert that into fairies, they would be enough for a Second Industrial Revolution, indeed they would be!"

"Awww... my village... my villaaage..."

I put a kind hand on Bonnie's shoulder as she cried.

"Do not feel down. I have ways to deal with this."

"Really? You can... reconquer the village...?"

"I can. I cannot do it immediately, but after making ready once more, gathering friends, and improving our equipment, or awakening to something, or doing some of many many things, I am sure that at some point we will manage to reconquer the place."

"And... how are we going to do all that?"

"That, but at Kusunoki, of course."

"That's your native village, isn't it. It's not my land."

"And is that not just fine. There are entire crowds of people, you could make new friends, you know? Let us move there, cool our heads a little bit."

"What, you mean we can go... together?"

I wanted to ask the converse question of why she thought she would not be allowed to come. Like that thing with the library, she felt... excluded, I should perhaps say.

"Just as I thought, that there says that you need to expand your horizons a little bit."

And with this spelling the end of the days of the troll hunt in Yanagi Valley, I could take a still-bawling Bonnie with me as I at long last set out on the journey back to the Village.

Bonnie's fear of living in a new land cracked on the third day.

"Look at how many mangas they have...!"

"This is what they call a 'computer game', wow!"

"These foods taste incredibly good!"

"These sweets taste incredibly good!"

"These drinks taste incredibly good!"

...she was gonna get fat if left alone.

And then the main problem, the fairies.

In the beginning, due to her anti-fairy tale bearing, she took her distance from fairies, but all else aside, this land was different. Not a week passed when she went,

"Ah, it's a fairy! Another fairy has taken the place of a paperclip on my desk!"

She did in fact become able to at least spot them.

It was just that...

"Come on down, come on down. Don't be scared. C'mo over here..."

"...huh... who are you?"

"It's me, Bonnie! I-, I want to be your friend! C'mon, don't be scared..."

With Bonnie before him, approaching slowly but steadily with both hands thrust before her, "Pi'gyah!"

"Awww he ran awayyy! ...seriously, they just won't get used to me... sigh."

It became something like someone who loved cats but was also hated by them, you see. Still, well, I was glad that she had become used to them.

By the time life had settled back down to a certain extent, she came out saying that she wanted to work, so she came to help in several matters as a second to Assistant-san. She was extremely handy in several jobs due to her personality which charged headlong into things regardless of anything else.

Having someone else to draw aggro made all the difference, as I suspected.

We were completely getting used to seeing her present in the Office, and it may have been a good thing to keep her there... but this happened just as I was beginning to think that.

The UN contacted us several times.

And they said:

*Once again a massive Fairy-Tale Level Disaster has developed in the vicinity of Yanagi Valley. Proceed there at once.*

With humans vanished and their influence removed, it was concluded that troll activity would come to an end, this was in the report I provided them, but... it appeared that they were still continuing to show up.

And I of course could not avoid heading there.

"I have prepared this new tool for you two, who are going once again out on a troll hunt..."

I took upon myself the equipment that Assistant-san merrily pushed into me and, with Bonnie behind me, we hurried back to Yanagi Valley.

And what a scene awaited us there...!

"We're recruiting new hunters! Reception is over at the Troll Hunting Association!"

"Those registering to be hunters will receive a Beginner's Toolset as a present! It's going to be handed over at the Hunter Association Central Office when your tutorial course is over!"

"Hunters' Arena is planned to be completed by next month!"

"Why, don't you youngsters need your Troll Hunt necessities! Buy well and we'll give you a present!"

"The Blacksmith is currently holding a bargain sale! For the duration, critical hit rate is doubled!"

"We handle all your rare materials!"

Yanagi Valley had entered the Great Age of Trolls!

We did lose our words for a moment there, but eventually Bonnie spotted something built in the center of the square.

"Say, that thing... look at that sculpture..."

Staring a moment at that bronze statue made me nearly spurt out the Hunter's Stamina Drink that I was sipping.

It was I.

"You two beginners? That statue, yeah, that's the Legendary Troll Hunter. That was

humanity's first Troll Hunter, she killed a hundred in a single night, discovered lots of rare materials and left behind little stories of all sorts. You two too, if you're gonna get on this path, you'd better do it with the goal of becoming a hunter as powerful as that!"

Listening to the explanation of the old barker might as well have made us both lose consciousness.

"...Bonnie-san."

"...what is it?"

"...your hometown has been revived, as you wanted, but what do you think about going back now?"

"...I won't do it. Besides, the branch office has been restructured into some building of unknown use."

It seemed that the former UN branch office was now the Troll Hunter Association HQ.

"...then, do we join up? With this hunter thing, I mean..."

"...and what do we do after that..."

"...well then... what do we do?"

"...what do we do, you ask me... what should we do?"

"...what should we do, indeed, about all this..."

Unable to figure out how to deal with all this, the two of us did nothing but stand stock still in the dead center of the village.

## Tale of the Farm at Night

It was a lazy afternoon.

With no urgent job to do, Assistant-san was in the Office, indulging in his reading.

Looking at the spine, the title of the volume was *Black Magic: The Complete Works*. An extraordinarily suspicious-looking text.

I peeked into it every time I passed past his side and spotted a page with a drawing of a creepy plant. Something like a root, but with a face...?

"This is the magical plant called Mandragora."

Assistant-san lifted his head and said that.

"Magical, you say."

"It's said that when pulled out of the ground it screams, and anyone who hears that scream dies."

"...and, do you want one of those?"

Assistant-san made the toughest of smile, as if he was saying that he was going to get one of those indeed.

...as always, he showed interest in the weirder things.

And for all that, he had to have been bored.

With the climate being mild, I wanted to take a midday nap.

"Wanna play theater?" "Let's!" "What do we do for the script?" "The usual will be fine!"

The fairies were confabulating in a corner of the room. Consulting each other about their pretend-play.

As long as they were doing that, well, things could still be said to be peaceful.

I passed my gaze on the room once more and found Mrs. Curly Hair sorting out documents.

Right, Curly Hair. My mysterious kouhai who had quit the UN but was occasionally part-timing for the UN anyway.

"...you there, with the curled-up hair, do you have any urgent jobs to do today?"

"This curled hair is raw. In other words, it's my bed hair."

"...so you were that mysterious a creature, huh."

It surprised me a little.

As far as her work, she was cautious and careful, and excluding how she tended to hate a colleague who was also my subordinate (although the person herself denies it), she could be said to be a superlative staff member, if a bit, well, like *that*. I wished for her to live peaceably as she was.

"By the way, there have been plenty of letters of complaints coming in, though nothing is urgent."

"What, how many of these are there?"

I quickly skimmed them and found,

\* Seen a zombie in the western woods.

\* Seen a vampire in the western woods

\* Seen a disembodied hand wandering about the western woods (similar complaints followed in large volume).

"Hah hah!"

I burst out laughing.

That was nothing less than an outbreak, that was.

"Why did you decide these aren't urgent? Your onee-san is confused."

"Because that sort of ridiculous creatures don't really exist!"

"Are you sure about that?"

And that I got from someone who let sleeping habits decide their hairstyle.

"Also, are you not aware of those creatures we call fairies in the first place?"

"What? But you see, fairies actually exist in reality, don't they?"

Why, seriously, this girl...

I wanted to give at least a look around while the sun was still up.

Hurriedly I made my preparations and, Assistant-san with me, I was about to depart when,

"What? You were asked to help with a major construction job this afternoon? Well then, there is nothing to be done..."

We were the town do-it-alls, the Office of Mediation (and borderless commissions such as these were actually frequent).

Then I was going to go alone, so I made my preparations and left the Office when,

"Eh heh heh. I'm gonna go with you!"

Mrs. Curly Hair was waiting for me dressed in exploration clothes and with a rucksack on her back.

"...this is not a picnic, and depending on how it goes it might become serious, you know."

"I'm all right. I know how I look like, but I have confidence in my survivability!"

"Suuure..."

Well, since all else aside the odds of her helping me with work were going to increase in the near future, this may have been a good opportunity to increase her experience level.

"Then it is fine. I will have you serve in the stead of Assistant-san, if you please."

"Excellent! I've done it!"

She hopped excitedly, and it must be said that it is only when seeing her like this that she felt like a cutesy young kouhai.

The western woods were right under the nose of the Village.

Walking for about an hour, passing past the one or two hillocks used for grazing, we could see the deeper woods.

"There's really a lot of buildings for being so far out there."

Seeing the remnants dotting the space between the trees, Curly Hair spoke out in surprise.

"Those are the ruins of a very ancient city. Right now it is all swallowed by the woods, but I have it that, if you push your way inside, you can find pristine buildings and facilities there."

"It could be said that they're comparatively speaking well-preserved."

"The Earth whole at this point is like that. There are even machines that still operate, so please do not approach any ruin carelessly, all right?"

"Yee-es!"

For that same reason, the roadways of that age also criss-crossed the woods.

At times, travelers made use of them, and the complaints that have led us to do this were compiled by travelers doing just that.

"Now then, let us begin investigation."

"Yes ma'am squad leader!"

"Today is just our first day, so we will be ve~ry breezily looking around."

"Or so I said, but we have not gone around for an hour and we have already discovered a suspicious mansion..."

It was located at the center of the sightings of unconfirmed species, putting it well beyond the level of merely suspicious.

"That's a ghost mansion like those depicted in the pictures."

Curly Hair whispered that casually.

"No, this looks like a properly-built mansion."

Just a mansion that I sort of had never seen before.

The land surrounded by steel fencing was large enough that one could drive through on horse-carriage, and the gothic-style building laying at its center looked impressive even at a distance.

In addition there was a Buddhist shrine and a gazebo, a tiny lake, and a mossy river shore. It had overall an exotic finishing and, before it ended like this, it would have been a garden to be proud of, one that spoke of the Middle Ages.

Whoever lived here had to be either a noble or someone of close status to one.

"Ah, the gate, it's open."

Not even remotely weighed back by that weight of history, Curly Hair pushed the iron gate open with a metal groan and stepped into the estate.

I followed after her with an exhaled sigh.

"This might sound obvious, but this has really stood for a long time, has it. But since the gazebo looks still usable, let's have our three o'clock tea there."

Was this a date now...

"We must inspect!"

"Of course, there's still two hours to go, so it's work time."

"...I sure hope we will have time for tea."

Standing before the front door, looking up at that mansion and the long time it has stood, I sort of felt some kind of wrongness... no, something slightly different, just the acute premonition of something that was going to turn out bothersome.

"It's all dilapidated, is it. People can't live here, can they."

"...I hope that is the case."

It was certainly in a bad state.

Vines were most certainly clinging to gutters and walls, and its appearance looked pale.

There was a large door-knocker so we slammed the door with that.

"My apologies, we come from the Office of Mediation!"

"Onee-san, I don't think there's anyone living here."

"...that I too pray for, I must say."

I slammed the knocker several more times, but there was no response from inside the mansion. The silence was audible.

"Look, it's just another ruin. You can't be thinking that zombies would be hiding in this ruined mansion? There is no way they would. This is a generation where, at present, humanity is fed up even with science, you know?"

And right then, even though no one was touching it, the door opened on his own.

"Hyh!"

Curly Hair took a perfect step back.

"Excellent force you exerted there. However, ghostly phenomena will not be avoided with a single step."



"But there's no way ghostly phenomenons exist!"  
She was tremendously taken aback by this.  
And it left me the impression that she was herself bothered about that fearfulness.  
It was a fear that she was not aware of... something like that?  
"If you do not wish to continue, then we can go back for the day."  
"What, but without tea we can't go back. Besides this is... right, an automated door!"  
Her mental state was still quite indomitable.  
"Call it an automated door, now, still... well, right."  
The door had opened wide, as if waiting for us to come by.  
It was just like a demon opening his mouth wide.  
...should we be this vigilant about it?  
I rotated my hip pouch forwards and put a hand on its lid.  
"What is that?"  
"A box of fairies. Useful in these occasions, see."  
There were fairies inside the camo-patterned waist pouch.  
They had all happily enlisted for this...  
"Now, I would like you fairies to mobilize, all right?"  
"Yessah!"  
A good number of fairies overflowed the instant I opened the lid. They had multiplied to several dozens, had they not. Even better, they were all in the same combat uniform.



Their military prowess was outstanding.  
 The fairies lined up neatly before me.  
 "This is Bravo Platoon!"  
 "This is platoon scale?"  
 "Bwah, so many fairies! Onee-san, you're incredible!"  
 Curly Hair was making merry.  
 ...she must have been fine with fairies, then.  
 "Now then, split up and secure the safety of this area, if you please."  
 "Yessah!" "Team Beautiful, gooo!" "Team Excellent, gooo!" "Team Cool, gooo!" "Team Respect, gooo!"  
 The fairies split up in teams and scattered within the mansion.  
 "Bwah, they do what you order them to! But what else should I expect!"  
 "Even if they make it safe, difficulties may still lay ahead, you see. Please prepare yourself for them."  
 "Fairies are so cute. I want one too!"  
 ...this was tiresome.  
 "Now then, let us have a look within the mansion. While praying that there is nothing."  
 "Yes ma'am!"  
 The instant we went from outside to the entrance hall, the door closed by itself behind our backs.  
 And then we could see what was written on the interior side of the door in vivid red letters!

Welcome to West Mansion!<sup>1</sup>

"Pftwh."  
 Mrs. Curly Hair fainted.  
 "Steady up! That is not blood, it is red paint!"  
 "T-, that's right! No way they exist, ghosts I mean!"  
 ...her recovery was fast.  
 "Onee-san, this automated door is broken. It won't open."  
 "...woah, what a pain."  
 So, however it was, we were forced to look around the mansion.  
 I once again glanced towards the interior and found that, similarly to outside, it was the dilapidated version of an once-luxurious place. The entrance hall was built quite spaciouly, but there was of course nothing that gave off warmth, rather, a chill air was making the rounds like it was a refrigerator or a cave.  
 It was built like often-encountered atriums, with staircases to the left and right allowing climbing up to a second floor.  
 On the sides of the first floor walls were armors standing there without helmets. In the middle of the landing there was the portrait of what seemed to be the owner of the mansion (blood running from his eyes ver.)  
 An item that evoked plenty feeling of horror.  
 Doors to the left and right seemingly led to separate wings.  
 "Shall we split up and investigate?"  
 "Pftwh."

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<sup>1</sup> In English also in the original text.

Curly Hair fainted.

"I was joking!"

"That was an evil joke!"

"Come now, I will give you one fairy."

I slid a fairy in one of Curly Hair's pockets.

"I-, if you say it's fine..."

Compatibility must not have been great, as the fairy seemed nervous.

...he looked like he would vanish soon, still, it was fine if he would make for a charm for a while, at least.

The investigation of the mansion's interior that came after that went approximately as foreseen.

First, in the great dining hall there was untouched food with steam still rising from it.

But there was no one residing there. A mystery, or should I say, a horror.

"Pftwh."

Curly Hair fainted, so I had her sit in a chair until I had finished investigating the room.

"...this is a normal dining hall."

There were no points of abnormality in the room outside the food. It was a mere dining hall.

"We got a report!"

"Bwah, do not just appear at my feet, please. I could step on you!"

Fairies suddenly appeared from underneath the table.

They formed a line, then only the squad leader moved forwards, saying,

"Team Wonderful could not discover any abnormalities!"

They all snapped a salute.

Indeed, adorable.

"...but did your team even exist a while ago?"

"Also, we could not find a single sugar cube!"

"Well, I do not have any sugar cubes either."

What I had were konpeitos, so I gave them in numbers equal to that of their team members as a bonus.

"We're well!"

The soldiers seemed satisfied.

"Then please continue the investigation."

"Roger!" "Go go go!" "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"

The fairies took a stance with their elastic band rifles and charged off somewhere.

"Now then..."

With all that aside, what bothered me was the food still steaming hot.

There was enough on the dinner table to feed seven or eight people, so without anyone to eat the food was only going to lay there and get cold.

*Let us try it*, and I proceeded to have a taste. Given it would have otherwise been wasted, of course.

"Ngh... this is not good."

It tasted surprisingly mediocre.

Hors d'oeuvres was a salad of plain grass, fish food was kanaboko grillé, soup was warmed muddy water... saying all that, I felt like I could agree. Even I could have made something that tasted better, I guessed.

And then, in the dessert pot there were crackers that did not feel crisp at all.

...it would be better for fairies not to get their hands on this, either.

This was improperly made food only made to startle the invited people... or so it would be fitting to think, but what was not coming up as fitting was the idea to startle invited people in the first place. What point would there be?

The mystery... laid elsewhere, of course.

I had to continue my investigation from the door at the back of the dining hall.

The corridor beyond the dining hall was a long and narrow one.

The walls were dirty and the carpet blackened and dull. The rags hung from the windows had to have been curtains, once.

The surface of the windows was covered with ivy grass, so there was nearly no sunlight filtering in. That was why it was abnormally dark.

Thinking that, I courteously borrowed a hand-carriable lamp that I found in the dining room.

"Now then, let us be off."

"Please don't leave me behind! Please, don't leave me behind!"

Mrs. Curly Hair ran towards me at full speed.

"Leaving me behind in a creepy dining hall is so sad! I'm gonna cry!"

"You are already crying, I see."

She already had moist, teary eyes.

"The fairy has also disappeared! This is much too sad! I'm gonna cry!"

"Awww, so he has already vanished..."

Compatibility with fairies had individual differences, so there was no helping it.

"Being left behind is just too harsh! I'm not made to be left behind! I'm better with being taken with!"

"I never meant to leave you behind. I simply forgot about you."

"Please don't forget me! I'm still alive! Forgetting is not a good thing!"

"I a-, apologize... I truly forgot about you..."

Pushed by her forcefulness I started stammering.

"I want us to go together! Up until the very ends of this corridor!"

"That far will be enough... then let us go, yes, let us go."

After stopping her crying, Mrs. Curly Hair was still on edge for a while, so I worried about her...

In the end, the corridor was merely long, there did not seem to be anything that could be said to be abnormal about it.

We proceeded down the dilapidated corridor finding the likes of ancient chests, broken flower pots, and gloves that had been trampled upon and were in the process of fusing into the floor when we happened on a row of doors on the right-hand side.

There were three rooms.

The first room seemed to be a wardrobe. It contained many clothes.

"But why are they all black?"

"It's like a preserve of mourning clothes."

Curly Hair said that, then casually opened the door to the closet.

"Pftwh."

And then lost consciousness.

"Why?!"

In the closet there was... a girl, crammed into it alongside clothes.

She was wearing black clothes with a harsh upside collar, but the flesh that barely peeked out was a terrifying white.

I did feel her cold when I touched her, but I did also find that she had a faint body heat.

A doll? Or a freshly disposed-of corpse?

"Fairieees, a thermometer!"

"Team Marvelous, on the go!"

The soldier fairies, having appeared from who knows where, offered me a thermometer.

"Then, if I may..."

I wore rubber gloves and took off the girl's clothes.

It was clothes that took a while and effort to wear, so to use the thermometer I needed to remove almost all of them.

So, the result of the temperature test...

"She has a faint warmth."

But touching her felt cold, and she was nearly not breathing.

Was it as it seemed... was she dead?

What bothered me was that her skin was all too hard. Rigor mortis, perhaps? But would it still have this resin-like springiness to it, I wondered.

I was spinning around various thoughts when the cadaver's eyes slammed open.

Our eyes met.

Then she let her gaze unhurriedly drop to her chest. And she was seeing how her clothes had just been removed.

"EEEEEEEEK!!!"

The girl fled the closet and escaped down the corridor.

...in an unladylike state of nakedness.

"T-, the cadaver moved! ...pftwh."

Curly Hair had regained her consciousness at the worst moment and re-fainted.

"...this is the first time since being born that I have seen a girl faint so frequently in one day."

I felt heavy mental fatigue as I stared for a while at Curly Hair huddled up like a fetus, moaning painfully.

The second room's interior left yet again a very different impression.

That was because it had an assortment of good-looking furniture that well represented a mansion.

This appeared to be the only room that was being kept cleaned, and in particular the ebony coffin set in its corner shone brightly, a mighty presence.

"Ngggh... huh? What am I doing? Ah, I'm being carried..."

I was carrying Curly Hair on my back, and I felt her stir a little, but soon as I did,

"Zzz..."

She was pretending to be asleep.

"Please come down. You are definitely not a light person."

"...I'm below my ideal weight, you know."

Embarrassed I had her alight. Then she gave a glance around the room and,

"W-, why is there a coffin?!"

"I cannot even imagine, but its location is where a bed would often be laid, I could say."

The special hint took Curly Hair aback.

"Well, opening the coffin would be fastest."

"Let's not do that. Opening a coffin... it's really not a good thing."

"I will open it."

Inside there was, as imagined, the cadaver of an emaciated man.

...for the time being I was going to try thinking it a cadaver.

"Uhm, is he alive?"

The man sleeping in the coffin slammed open his eyes, and as soon as he did,

"What, no, what is it? Who... what?"

He lifted himself up looking deathly afraid so,

"I deeply apologize for waking you up when you were resting. I am a Media-"

"What, no, dear me, no..."

He did not listen to me at all and instead left with hurried feet.

Or should I have said, he fled...?

"That there, it was a realistic response to finding out that there were suddenly people inside your house, was it not."

Hearing no response coming for a moment I turned back, and there I saw that Curly Hair had peacefully fainted.

"Today I've done nothing but sleeping, onee-san, so I'll be investigating the third room!"

Mentally stable from explaining away her fainting as sleep, she blurted out something undaunted.

"Do expect something out of this, please, today I'm going to be of service!"

Repeatedly uttering that so weirdly meant she was perhaps concerned within herself that she was being a burden.

"Ch'ei!"

The third door was opened.

For whatever reason, there were tombstones strewn about that room.

The windows had all been sealed so it was dark, so the sole and only lights seemed to be those of Halloween pumpkins, laughing without a voice.

And at the center of that in-room graveyard was a human figure shambling slowly to the sides.



"....."

Curly Hair stiffened without a word. She had to have been struck by a terribly bad premonition.

After all, that shambling person did not seem to be a person at all.

And still we had to talk to them.

"My apologies. Uhm, there would be something I would like to inquire about..."

The shambling person unhurriedly turned back.

"Pftwh."

Curly Hair fulfilled her duty.

But just this one time I felt I could follow after her.

The person who had turned around had a pale face, and his cheeks were sunken. Just like... just like!

"I may look like a zombie, but I'm human."

In the parlor, the zombie-like person spoke that with a calm voice.

"So I see..."

The two who had also run away earlier were, of course, residents of this place.

And they were courteously participating to these talks.

To protect personal information, the waxwork doll girl will be recorded as D-san, the vampire man as Mr. V, and the one that was also their representative, the zombie-like person, as Mr. Z.

That was because it would be of course unacceptable not to make a report about people who lived right outside the city limits.

"Well, I am glad you are not really one."

Mr. Z made a composed smile.

"Should I ever see a real zombie or the like I would start shuddering myself."

A dry laugh came out.

I was really glad this was a misunderstanding.

"And so, D-san, thank you very much for doing all that for her."

I was talking about Mrs. Curly Hair. Since she had fainted, doll-like D-san was looking after her on the sofa.

"W-, well, I don't mind since I'm used to this..." went D-san.

Once in a while, she pointed a fearful gaze towards me.

It was probably because, as she was resting in the closet (or so she said), she suddenly found her clothes taken off, so she was oddly vigilant about me.

Uh-huh.

She was vigilant about another woman who had taken off her clothes.

I could not believe I had gotten into a situation like that, human life was truly a thing of mystery.

Incidentally, her attire were mourning clothes like those at present found in her room. Viewed it in this light, the overelaborate dark clothes on her pale skin gave her a ghostliness the kind unseen in this world.

"I now understand that you are all human. But I am to say it and, well... you do all have this appearance to you like... you were all the departed."

"That's not hard to understand. Our looks are a little different from those of normal people. To say it, we are the descendants of what was called the Family of the Night."

"The Family of the Night?"

"We're not in recorded history, but we do exist. We're not a specific single family, however, we're a composition of a countless number of smaller families. That's why we possess disparate characteristics despite being the same family. As shared characteristic, every one of



us is hereditarily nocturnal. Therefore, during the day we're deep asleep."

I did think that this person looked handsome, excluding the part where he looked zombie-like, and the way he spoke was intelligent and reasoned, meaning personality-wise he seemed trustworthy.

"AuUUH! D'ahhh..."

Suddenly, he began drooling and groaning.

"W-, what is it?"

"He does that at times. It's just a chronic disease, pay it no attention."

Mr. V, the vampire-like person at his side, began wiping the zombie's lips with a lacy handkerchief. And Mr. Z enveloped said Mr. V's head and began biting it.

"T-, that hurts, yes! My little brain is not that tasty! Stop!"

"Brains...? is that what he wants?"

"N-, not at all. I don't think, no, that he does... maybe."

Though he said that, he restrained Mr. Z's top half to the chair.

"This is all right. Just one more minute and..."

Mr. Z, after groaning and moaning and swaying for a while, suddenly returned to having intelligent eyes and,

"...huff. In short, well, I hope you can think of us as being a race like that. We have the same hair and skin color and physique. It's just that, with our peculiarities such as being nocturnal, a little bit of trickery is required to live a normal life, so similar families would of course come together and solidify their lifestyles."

Mr. V and D-san released Mr. Z from the rope.

"So are there others besides you?"

"There are. We're a very small family of about thirty, but there are groups that have people by the hundreds. We live in avoidance of people's eyes, however, so we're not well known."

*That all aside*, and Mr. Z sat up straight.

"An investigator from the UN has thus come to visit us, does that mean that our presence has become a problem?"

"It does. At our Village, well, they say that around here... there live hidden people, I suppose I should phrase it as."

The three made gloomy faces, with D-san in particular feeling pressed, who then,

"Are you saying we have to leave again?!"

"What do you mean by 'again'?"

D-san was seething with rage, but Mr. V restrained both her shoulders as he said this.

"Us little guys are sorta easy to get misunderstood."

"I understand the situation, but is not living intentionally concealed itself a problem? You appear suspicious."

"Truth is, even the place we live now isn't our original one. And given the number of people we have, going to a different village would easily cause trouble. Worse, we're nocturnal, and some of us do occasionally attempt to bite people's heads, that can also cause a kerfuffle."

"...this is truly a significant matter, indeed."

"That's why we thought of trying to live here discreetly so as to avoid overly agitate the local residents. Happily, we by nature happen to love ruins and long-weathered rooms, so a villa deep in the woods we found as just right,"

so went Mr. Z.

"I am not so sure about that, however."

"But we don't want to agitate the local residents, we don't want to yet again be chased away

with crucifixes and stakes, you see?"

"...that was all your fault. You said you were going to stop a child's bleeding injury, but all you did was bite into the wound, that would of course be misunderstood."

...so that really happened?

"Well, do you like blood?"

"Indeed, I didn't know by my little self but it appears I do. I want to drink it very very much. Besides, the day after drinking even just a little bit of blood my headache and backache both disappear, and I feel so fresh and revitalized. In fact, not drinking some makes my little physique worsen, what a problem that is."

At long last Mr. V came out with the twist.

So he... was the real deal?

"Hearing that, I believe I ought avoid mistakenly ingesting brains, right."

Mr. Z said something terrifying with a smile.

"...so I see, there are over thirty of you."

With a number of people that high it would be difficult to mix into a village all at once.

"And it's all right, miss Mediator. We don't want to cause problems. If you accept our residing here, then we want and will live in secrecy.

"That would never get you the support of the UN."

"We've lived in self-sufficiency so far."

...without enough to eat their reasoning abilities would go away. Then they would hunt for what they really want and...

I swept away that terrifying thought.

I had to nip this in the bud.

But since there was a bit of a problem with them mingling in, due to being a minority for example, I had to proceed prudently. Which meant,

"Understood. Being this place here is no man's land, please make use of it for the meantime.

Though I suspect it will not be easy to be self-sufficient here."

Mr. Z nodded deeply then,

"I see. Whatever else, being nocturnal as we are, our options are limited even in farming and handling livestock."

"How have you managed thus far?"

D-san scrunched her face.

"Old preserved food, these wild grasses, those fruits of the trees. It's terrible. Well, as far as food I can live more than well by feeding only once a week, so I can afford to eat only when something decent's on the platter, though."

So she... was the real deal?

"...that helps with us staying self-sufficient."

"And that's to be thankful for! After all, we can't just agitate the people of Kusunoki by leaving the woods and building farms."

"About that... in the dining hall there was food left over, how come?"

"Right, we have our breakfast from evening till night, so that was the meal for those of us who wake up early and go out procuring food. They wake up at around four in the afternoon, you see."

"That would be a waking hour that would mark someone as completely hopeless, were they human."

"Well, I do agree with that."

Mr. Z showed me the smile of an upstanding person... or so it looked like, because right then!

"Uwah. Aoh. Brains, brain, brain. Juicy brains..."

So he... was the real deal?

I focused hard as I watched Mr. V once again put him under restraints.

Working as sort of consultants for Mr. Z's group, as transparently obvious, made my workload increase.

The final goal was that of having these people accepted by the residents of our land, however the pressing issue was to assist them in becoming self-sufficient.

Population was under thirty, so we did not need farming on a large scale. Assistance-wise, there were more than enough means to procure food, of course.

So how far were we to look?

What to do about the present?

As the result of inquiring about those things, I learned that their lifestyle was, in practice, close to that of hunter-gatherers.

There was a reason why they had become so primitive in their lives, and it laid in the preferential tendencies of the each individual member.

For example, Mr. Z had the perfectly normal taste of preferring meat, and, besides how he was also fine with rotten meat, he once blurted out *"I don't want to ask for too much, but if you ask me my tastes, then I prefer brain meat... ah, no, please, forget about it"*, words that I took as a precept and absolutely did not forget.

Mr. V also had a strong fixation with blood, without it his physique would degrade into chronic diseases, suffering as he would of headaches and stiff shoulders and various other maladies, a disposition that would make him instantly like any food as long as he could intake of even modest quantities of that substance.

As for D-san, she could preserve her living functions by intaking food nearly completely solidified, she had a physique largely similar to that of fairies.

Common request was only that they be nocturnal activities, so I expected there to be pains in the securing of food.

Up until now they made do with a bit of a vegetable garden, but it did not seem to be going well, so they had to supplement with fishing, hunting, and gathering from plants.

We had absolute need to make farmlands of this huge garden, such as we could harvest a variety of crops.

Fortunately, the Village had plenty of specialistic know-how concerning farmland management, and it was just a matter of compiling it into a manual and giving it to them.

"We will make farmland of everything from about here to about there."

"What? That much?"

Mr. Z was very surprised.

There was just about enough space for thirty people to manage.

"Without securing at least that much, you can forget about self-sufficiency."

"It's all because we've never lived long in a single place, see. Right, that is, if we are to think of changing our way of life, then we're forced to put down our roots..."

"The seedlings and the manure will be a shared contribution, workforce will be all as one. As things develop, then, you will be considered as nothing more than a neighboring village."

"Ohhh. It would be very nice if we were."

Mr. Z made a smile so bright it almost did not suit his pale face.

Request for the procurement of soil-improving materials.

Request for the supply of tools and materials.

Request for the procurement of selected seedlings and crop seeds that can be managed through work exclusively at early morning or late night.

All under the pretense of helping self-sufficiency for refugees.

Request, request, request.

There was even a something like a form for permission to submit all these requests in such a short period of time.

Sigh, this has been the first time ever since I had become a Mediator that I had compiled these many documents.

"Compiling documents is so annoying I could die..."

"Like yer the one to say!"

Y, who was helping me, shouted that.

With her and Assistant-san both together our Office was fully mobilized and we somehow managed.

"Still, we got something done, one way or the other... say, on this document here, if these blank spaces aren't all filled it'll get thrown back at us, won't it? And it's all stuff I dunno how to fill."

"Then please figure out how to fill them."

"I'm filling this stuff in despite it being a photocopy of some ancient document, still... wow, the last time this document was filed was eighty years ago. Is there any point in doing any of this?"

"Do not think and do not feel."

"Fine, fine... still, you're gonna have to pay up for dinner."

If she was fine with that then her help came at a cheap price indeed.

This was all pointless procedures that remained to us in mere form. That was the framework, to put it. However, if the meaningless were to disappear, so would the humanity... a maxim that I would want left written somewhere alongside my name.

I wanted at least the future generations to flatter me.

"I'm embarrassed to say that I have returned..."

The following day I spotted the figure of a fairy on my desk top, which surprised me.



He was several layers dirtier than before, but he was unmistakably one of those fairies playing at soldiers.

"But it has been several days since then..."

Going from the usual pattern, I expected that they would quickly get bored, forget what they were doing, and disperse.

"That's what military personnel do?"

"That is something..."

I was very impressed.

"For the glory of Italia!"

"Then, as far as the plan, it was..."

"The Make the Land Feel Nicer Plan!"

...right, right. I did give them that instruction.

And then I failed to recover the fairies and went home alone. As always. After all, if left alone they would automatically disband.

But as far as this one fairy went, he did not know that the war was over and had remained behind on the battlefield to fight (?), indeed.

His eyes had some sort of grief to them, the kind that only someone who has survived long on the cruel field of battle would have.

However, now that he had...

"...where are the other fairies?"

Asked, the fairy put his fingers on the inner side of his eyes.

"They were brave to the last."

"What do you mean?!"

"It was a hard plan, it had no supply chain..."

"Supply..."

"Like, of chocolate bars..."

"Ahhh, I see, because I had not handed you any sweets."

"They had no chocolate bars, no nothing, but... they pushed their limits, they did everything they could, and then..."

"A-, and then?"

The fairy restrained his sadness as he said this.

"There were no sweets, so it was bye-bye them."

"My, I believed they would go home right away, but if they pushed their limits and did everything they could, well..."

"Yeah..."

They suffered starvation, one might as well phrase it as, not that it was a problem.

"And you did your best, too, even among those. Well done."

"For the glory of Italia!"

...Italia?

"Anyway, I should give you your reward."

I took out my special reserve from inside the fridge.

As size it just about fit without trouble within the palm of a hand. It was a very colored baked sweet.

"B-, but this is...!"

The fairy weaved left and right.

"The hamburger of sweets!"

"It is called a macaron. You can fit jam or whatever you like between these baked pieces of dough. Truly a sweet hamburger..."

Receiving this sweet for probably the first time made the fairy dazed. Holding the macaron with both hands, he unhurriedly bit the lone morsel, just to try it.

"?!"

The rest was forgetting everything else but that. He promptly stuffed his cheeks like a pencil sharpener.

"You ate that in an instant, I see."

"Sigh... for an instant my head was a Happy Meal..."

No helping it, I guessed, having been deprived of sweets for so long.

To phrase it for humans, he was suffering from starvation.

"Did you not have anything back when you were departing?"

"We were paid with one or two military rations of sugar cubes, but... they vanished right away!"

"Military rations of sugar cubes."

What was that military even doing with itself?

"Sweet. Delish."

Everything else aside, the fairy was occupied for a little while in stuffing his cheeks with the macaron.

Given this exchange we had, I was convinced that the fairies I had scattered in that haunted mansion had quickly dispersed and left.

One day, the folks came to ask me for help regarding the D-san's abandonment of farm work.

"...well, you can bring this tale of internal strife to me if you like, but I simply cannot do much about it."

Mr. Z's pale face, now the figure of anguish, expressed this with teary eyes.

"She's an individualist, so she won't exactly do as we tell her. However, she respects you, and I believe she will listen to you."

"No, that was not respect, it was just fear..."

"If it was fear, then it was almost the same thing. Please, you must help us."

"But still..."

"Please, I beg you!"

...I was pushed firmly.

And with that as reason I went to D-san.

"Why do you not like farm work?"

"Because it's wrong, you know? I'm given the same amount of work as others despite barely eating anything."

"You seem to have noticed that. Indeed, it is unfair."

"...and you say it yourself, huh."

"I do it because, when a problem is reported, I need to deal with it. However, even excluding that reason, shared work is much more highly profitable, and it might make it easier to deal with the people of Kusunoki, you see."

"I don't care about any of that. We are they who proudly walk the world at night! Being just a bit mysterious is precisely right for us. ...don't you understand?"

"Huh. I am in fact the kind who enjoys the stranger tales even among fantasy stories, if I may say."

"So you do, right? Doing like Mr. Z, living all in secret, it just doesn't align with my interests. To the point where I much prefer living in something like Chinoike Jigoku, or a BIG pond o' bloood!"

"I do not quite understand that comparison, but I get what you are saying."

"Understanding is better than nothing. For being a normal human you're really something."

"Thank you..."

"Besides, I have low blood pressure, and I feel weak at night."

"That is putting it backwards."

"And because of that, I've decided that I will not fulfill that duty."

She kept piling on circuitous reasons, but what she really wanted was to not do the job, of course.

And with that, was there any different avenue of persuasion?

...there was.

"Self-reliance is like that, I see."

Praised (criticized?) lavishly, she went,

"Heh heh heh, it looks like you finally figured it out."

"Still, if you do not do farm work, you will leave a bad impression on the others, will you not? You know that may lead to no one helping you with all those clothes should it become time for you to move again?"

D-san growled a *haw!* and sunk in deep thought.

"That there is important, I say, being in a group. Even if you help just a little, the others will follow you along more easily, I think."

"That's definitely true..."

But although she said that, she looked reluctant still.

"Could it be that there is a different reason for why you do not wish to do farm work?"

"Well, I won't say there isn't, though..."

D-san's words dragged, rare for someone so incisive.

This was the real her, I thought.

"And the reason that you would not say there is not would be?"

"See, my clothes would get all dirty."

"...ahhh."

A convincing reason.

As she did nearly not sweat at all, her clothes would not get dirty during daily life. Consequently, and unlike us people who get tub baths on a daily basis, she was strongly against getting dirty with soil.

"And that should be obvious, since these are clothes that I sewed throughout my difficult life, all with the despair of death at the door!"

"I am sad to say, then, that no matter how you deal with soil, you will get your clothes dirty."

"And that's why I don't want to do it!"

"Then just wear these... brown overalls when farming!"

"Wearing something that nasty would make my soul die!"

"And is that anything a person that is about to do something as useful as cultivating would say?"

"When I say no it's no!"

What a spoiled princess!

"Then may I move you to the lumbering team?"

"The lumbering team, huh..."

It was the job with the highest brawn requirement. Still, it will not get one stinking dirty like messing about with the soil.

"The chainsaws were just delivered, so they will start with proper work soon."

"I don't think that's a woman's job, but... I suppose it's better than playing in the dirt."

Though she muttered complaints, I still transferred her to the lumbering team.

A few days passed, then,

"I'm really happy with a chainsaw! I wonder why, it's such a mystery!"

For whatever reason she seemed to enjoy them very much, because today not only was she wearing frilly black clothes, she was happily wielding a chainsaw.

Now why did black frilly clothes have an affinity with chainsaws, I wondered?

I had no right idea. Anyone interested by this should please do their own research.

This happened soon after they turned the estate's land into a farmland and began properly planting crops.

"This is just weird," Mr. Z said.

"We began harvesting some of the crops already, but..."

"What are you trying to say?"

I came to see how it was going every few days, and each time I was buried with questions, however... today things looked a little bit weirder.

"Are your crops growing poorly?"

"No, the crops are doing well."

"Are you bothered by insects?"

"No, we are generously using the pesticides given to us, so that's not it either."

"Well then, what is the problem?"

"You should perhaps see by yourself."

A number of harvested crops were presented before me.

They were all objects of bizarre shape that I had never seen before.

"What, these are the crops?"

"Yes."

"Really? These things... that look like wicked lifeforms from outer space?"

"These are soybeans."

"But there are some here as thick as an arm."



"These are soybeans."

Soybeans were grown stuffed into bottles and under the deep darkness of night. It took only a short time before they became harvestable, and were a perfect fit for this village in the deep darkness of the night. That was what I was thinking when I proposed them.

The people here did not have the wit even for them.

"This means they were not put into bottles."

"When they were put into bottles they were normal beans, but they got bigger and bigger and broke out."

"The bean burst out, they are like the mouths of those aliens..."

"If you are going to bite into one, then please be careful."

The soybeans (or so Mr. Z kept insisting they were) twitched from their centers on top of the wooden box.

"If the bean part is properly struck and killed, and its blood properly sucked out, they look like they would be edible, but, see, this is just creepy."

"Sucking out the blood?!"

"The meat is sinewy, and there is no scarcity of it."

"Meat?!"

I thought we were discussing beans, but I was mistaken.

"How did you grow them that they became like this?"

"...well, to say it, I don't really know. Do you have any idea what this is all about?"

"Well, that is... sorry, even I do not know much of that..."

And after that, bizarre things kept happening one after the other.

"Hello, sensei, I've built the trellis for the grapes."

Blood-loving Mr. V was in charge of building the grape trellises.

"Well done. Hard work made it possible to harvest the types of grapes that can grow even here."

The plan was to make grapes and get on over to laying our hands on wine. However that of course would take time, so it was a long-term project. There was also my personal wish of how sooo nice it would have been to have home-produced wine.

"About those grapes... they have already grown, I see."

In normal grape-farming, grapes would take several years to become harvestable. A harvest after not even a couple of months was unthinkable.

These were harvested in a short span of time, just like those soybeans from before, but...

"I've brought some of the actual crops, will you look at them? Or rather, do please look at them, yes, I'm too scared!"

And the *thing* was brought before me.

"....."

I could not quite come up with words.

Did grapes not come in bunches, normally?

"Despite that, how come there is only one grape? Besides, this is the size of a crick... a bowling ball..."

"According to the guy in charge, that's the result of cannibalization, and this is the only grape that survived."

"Uhm, what are you talking about?"

"Come ooon, I'm talking about cannibalization between grapes."

"Between grapes?"

"Between grapes."

Mr. V nodded with a serious face.

"So the grapes cannibalized each other and that's why this has become so enormous, you see. Ah, feel free to touch it. It's already dead."

And once I saw it, what was I supposed to do?

The single grape was soft-ish and well fattened.

Perhaps unable to preserve a clean spherical shape due to its own weight, it was somewhat squished.

I searched my mind for something to compare it to, and I came up with nothing else but a creepy flabby-bodied creature from the depths of the sea.

"By the way, did you try tasting it?"

"Yes, and it's really good! It's got the rich flavor of blood. I think that wine made with it would be wonderful, yes, I do."

Ahhh, so it was good.

I felt my mind going away.

It was telling me that, yeah, there was no need to sweat the details.

...it was telling me that so long as it tasted good, all was fine.

"Hey, have a look at this."

D-san was dragging a net for capturing wild animals behind her.

I had been sulking quite a bit these days.

The result of a human being having everything they do turn into something beyond expectations was a fall into desperation.

"So is what you are saying that, at the roots of a tree that you were lumbering, you found some strange animal like a giant leech making a mess?"

"My, you understand pretty quickly. That's exactly so. And that's why I need a chainsaw that's a little bit more powerful. If I'm to take on the likes of these, I need a chainsaw that is even sturdier, if possible one with a device that can fire buckshot..."

The cage rattled hard at our feet.

Perhaps the land was cursed. Or perhaps it was a problem with the people.

Whatever it was, this meant mediating between these and the Village was a dream upon a dream.

"...you have not been helping me of late, I would say."

Sat at her own seat in the Office, Curly Hair stood bolt upright with a shudder.

"I-, I've been busy lately... and a lot..."

Simultaneous shortness of breath.

"My now, is that the real reason?"

Mrs. Curly Hair was caring for her hobby bonsai at her desk in the Office. To assert that that was work involved quite a bit of distress.

"Ah, besides! Onee-san, you've been constantly going off to that haunted mansion of late, so... you're very busy, I'm going to say..."

Shivering, cold sweat.

"And what I mean is that you should be coming with me to that haunted mansion, should you not. There are ghost-like people there, there is much to learn from them. Though of course they are not really ghosts, they are just people that you can see through in transparency because their sense of presence is not that great."

"And are those really human..."

The human psychology in play here said that her vanishing voice implied she did not want to reveal the real identity of something she found terrifying and uncertain.  
It seemed she was well aware of how poorly she handled the horror genre.  
"What on Earth would that job be, anyway? You could leave it to the fairies, you could leave it to that man, there are many ways, however."  
'That man' meant Assistant-san, by the way.  
"I delegated the majority of daily work to him, he does not have any free time."  
"Well, why isn't he being of more use?!"  
"Curse me if he is not. So, will you be of help to me instead?"  
".....I'm useless, my apologies."  
Her mind had utterly caved in.

While I was looking around the haunted mansion I discovered traces of a camp left behind by the fairies. There was the remnants of a fire at the roots of a tree.  
Though apparently made use of during their military movements, there was no trace of fairies themselves.  
"Fairieees, are you heeere?"  
The woods held their silent breaths, and there was nothing that said anyone would come to reply.  
They had gone far away.  
"...I have a bad feeling about this."

The reveal of why the vegetables and the fruits were running rampant came from an unexpected place.  
It came from the potato field.  
"Sensei, we got another weird thing from the fields."  
Mr. Z came requesting help as soon as I arrived at the mansion, as always near the night.  
"Congratulations about that."  
It had become normal for crops made around the mansion of the dead to turn fiendish.  
Dealing with crops that had gone feral or cannibalistic could not possibly be more bothersome, but there was just one point in favor for this all: the excellent taste.  
Managing them was a big problem, but there was a proportionate profitability. Only once had I taste-tested them, but I understood quickly the reason why vampires liked to sip on human blood.  
Even better, when they turned fiendish their growth also accelerated explosively, it was all good things.  
"This here is a little different from the usual."  
The oddity had appeared in the potato field, so we quickly walked to it.  
We found that several of the residents were in an uproar as they surrounded the site.  
"Whaaat, did they grow to be that fiendish?"  
The residents all ignored me.  
"Excuse me...!"  
D-san, among the group, turned to face me. She seemed to have earplugs. No, it was not just her, everyone present there had earplugs.  
"You'd better wear earplugs, too."  
I was given a pair of earplugs.  
"How come?"

"....."

Please at least remove your plugs when talking...

"There was something odd among the potatoes we were growing."

"Could you show me?"

"If you want to see then wear those plugs. We've already had victims."

"Victims, like..."

Looking at the side, I saw Mr. V laid on a stretcher.

"Wait, is he dead?! This is serious!"

"Ah, it's all right. He's just in a state of apparent death. He'll come back soon."

And as she said that,

"Oh dear? What happened to poor little me, I wonder?"

He abruptly lifted his upper body.

He could resuscitate himself.

Was he... human?

"When we yanked out some unfamiliar weeds the root screamed out, and those who heard it died one after another."

"There's more dead?!"

"...they all returned back to the living in less than an hour, but even I died for the first time in a long while, you see."

Yup, definitely not human at all, I must say.

Mh? When yanked out they screamed and that made people die?

"...could this be a mandragora?"

"And what's that?"

I told her the characteristics of that plant as I heard them from Assistant-san and,

"Indeed, that's exactly what this is, yes."

"Hu-huh. For the world to shine with utmost splendor it finds a use even for the most demonic of things, and you people slipped right into that position in the hierarchy, that is what this is all about."

"Wh-, what're you talking about?"

"I just mean that I understand all this, in my own way."

Then, as I was shown the mandragora-type thing,

".....a fairy?"

The thing, a leaf growing out of his head and pale-white, burned-out, merely looked like a subspecies of fairy.

"...p'shuuuh..."

He was burned out.

"We find this plant growing here and there in the soil, and since every time we yank one out there's a victim, it's getting to be a problem."

Mr. Z had a blanching face... which was as he always was, but still...

Ahhh, what I meant to say was that the color of his face was as always.

"Worse, they grow back in an instant! While we're having a party they grow up firmly one after another, it's impossible to deal with them. For now we're all wearing earplugs as we yank them out, but we no sooner do that they multiply... you're the crop specialist, do something about this!"

"Well, I am not exactly a specialist about that."

But mandragoras were perhaps a subspecies of fairy.

"Ah, no, I am a specialist."

"Which is it?"

"I will proceed to investigate."

I brought the mandragara's spent shell to where no one could see us.

"...hello?"

"P'shuuuh... aWhat?"

The fairy, his complexion turned a blanching white, woke up.

"You are a fairy, are you?"

"...sorta."

"Why are you doing this?"

"...it felt right?"

"So you are fitting into the monstrous mood of this place?"

"Guess that's it!"

It was currently the hour of a pleasant evening.

The sun was setting and a refreshing night was soon to visit us.

Humans were out of their element from evening until night, normally, of course. I was too among the normal people.

Right, out of my element.

"Mandragora-san, it does not do to inconvenience people. Why, it seems like that when you cry, people die."

"But I only make people who can't die die, you know?"

"Then there is no problem. I could leave you be."

Nature did have things that were better left where they were.

And so I was going to believe in them and have them left alone!

That was the proper answer.

When I returned, I declared this to the people of the haunted mansion.

"This plant is OK, no need to weed it out."

"But why!," went D-san, the joints in her limbs stiff as she agitatedly swung them about.

"Because where mandragoras grow the plants grow better, and I can guarantee safety."

After all, they were the soil edition of fairies.

"But if not removed they keep multiplying without end, so they suck away the nutrients of the soil."

"They may keep multiplying, but I believe they will vanish eventually. Worrying about the nutrients of the soil is unnecessary, as well. It is more likely that they will be improved, I might say."

"Will they?"

"They will. The crops are growing well after all, are they not?"

The assembled group made faces that said they understood this.

"With no need to uproot them there is no need for earplugs, either, so just leave them alone.

With that, everything will go well. Just, when the time for your more abundant harvest comes, please scatter this..."

I took a bottle of konpeitos out of my tote bag and,

"...all about the grounds, with your thanks to the mandragoras."

"Why konpeitos? Shouldn't we give bread or something as thanks for the soil?"

"It is fine whatever the type of sweet product, but bread will not do. Also, they are not good with spicy sweets, either."

The assembled group made faces that said that they did not understand this.

"Anyway, just do that. For this whole land, and from now on."

The mandragoras just did not grow anywhere except the surroundings of the mansion, which meant there was a point in how they did not infect the Village and instead remained to live in this land.

I was visiting Undead Mansion for the first time in two weeks.

In that while, I did a bit of work, a bit of playing with the fairies, a bit of reading and a bit of drinking wine. Refreshing.

Of course, ignoring them for as much as one week made me worried, but as soon as I headed towards the mansion...

What awaited this indolent I was a scene from another world, a Halloween party.

"There are so many people!"

It was all faces that I had seen before, with the majority being seemingly residents of Kusunoki.

As the dilapidated mansion had underwent a transformation into a mansion designed as dilapidated, it expressed slapstick-like terrifyingness.

The signboards were splattered with gore, walls had faces surfacing on them, a creepy group with their faces hidden behind triangular masks was walking about, and from nowhere in particular I could hear the background music of women screaming.

A large number of tents big and small had been added to the garden, each seemingly offering its own ominous attraction.

Inside and outside the mansion surrounded by all these new things were a variety of people coming and going, some wearing monstrous clothes, others being the residents of the mansion who looked monstrous without needing clothes, all having fun.

"How did it come to be like this...?"

"Ah, onee-san, welcome!"

Mrs. Curly Hair was wearing a frilly black dress as she came to welcome me.

"I see someone here who had once said they would never come."

"I was convinced this place was scary, but that's not true at all!"

She was holding plenty in her arms, a plate of potato butter, a chainsaw-shaped candy bar, a scary doll with a kitsch coloring, and wore a full-face smile.

"There are many many things I would like to ask, but, about those clothes?"

"I got it by goods exchange at Rococo Mansion."

"Rococo?"

"That tent over there."

"A tent..."

Where she pointed at stood a pitch-black, frilly, and ornate curtain, with young girls pushing and shoving one another for access.

"These clothes here, they suddenly started being popular this week. Want some, onee-san?"

"On me, clothes like that would either look well or really poorly, either way I would stand out something fierce and therefore I do not want them."

"Whaaat, but they would fit you so well, I think..."

Still, that these gaudy and lacy clothes would come to be popular meant the world was at its end... which also said that humanity has declined far too much, however.

"They are making a racket, are they not."

There seemed to also be a crowd at the drinking place, making it truly a festival.

"It hasn't been a week since things here started being popular, but among my acquaintances there's also some that have kids so addicted they gotta be inpa every day."

"Inpa?"

"Ah, it's the word that indicates someone who comes here. In-park."

What a bizarre word...

"This is your first time here since things changed, right? I'm gonna show you around!"

I was dragged hard as we went.

All else aside, the place was overflowing with food. The majority of foodstuff was seemingly offered free of charge.

Which made me think, therefore, that their harvests had increased explosively.

It was just that not one of the foodstuffs was a good and proper one, they were all Undead Mansion-style.

Innard-style trifles, sun sausages, fresh blood jam, poisonous scones, tar-style cola, congealed blood bars, soybean kebabs.

"They're all really good. They do look creepy at a glance, though."

A headless knight came by and stared at me and my empty hands.

"Ohhh, now then well then, lady. The best of greetings on this evening. Have a free balloon!"

This headless knight was a resident of the mansion. Initially I thought him a decoration of the entrance, however.

So they were actually alive.

Although I did not know where his voice was coming from.

And then that headless person handed me a creepy balloon. In what was called balloon art, it was a weave of balloons that resembled a brain.

"I did not want it but I still took it..."

"I was startled in the beginning, as well, but the souvenirs from this mansion are all creepy."

Mrs. Curly Hair, her clothes like a bisque doll's, said that with a face that was not entirely displeased.

"But for what it is, this is more than a bit good!"

Certainly, these sort of tastes were refreshing, as far as a past-time went. Enjoying the scary, why, I never thought of doing that.

I found many more attractions as I looked around on my own.

Zombie shooting and ghost searching. A lecture on good luck charms and a first-person experience horror show with the interior of the mansion as stage.

Magical therapy by pulling out mandragoras and resting in the sound sleep caused by hearing their scream.

"Sleeping at the hotel here you can see a spiritual parade in the dead of night. That's only if you stay awake, though."

"Hu-huh. In short, this is a festival held every day, is it not. And all of bizarre shows I have never seen before."

And looking around like this, it seemed that there were many female guests.

With their abundance of sensitivity, women were easily taken in as soon as they saw people in dark, lacy clothes holding creepy little character dolls in hand.

"Now then, I have to participate to a dress contest, so I'm leaving for now."

Leaving that said, Mrs. Curly Hair once again rushed into the noisy crowd.

Dress, right. To infer, that was *her* doing, of course.

All that aside, what a gloomy theme park this was.

"If I am to give it a name, this would be Dismaland (from dismal in the sense of gloomy) or something."

"Ohhh, that's a very good name!"

Mr. Z, clothed like a gentleman, shouted that from behind my back.

"...I would like you not to sneak up behind my back, please. It makes the horror element stand out too much."

"My apologies."

"That aside, I see you are really doing well."

"Well, the stalls that we put up without that much care in order to deal with travelers turned into this in the blink of an eye."

"I am of course surprised. It appears the harvest was a great success."

"It's all thanks to these mandragoras."

"P'shaaah!"

A fairy-like creature growing leaves from his head jutted out his face from the manager's breast pocket.

"Ngh, I feel a bit sleepy..."

"The sleepiness will vanish right away. These creatures are really marvelous. They make the crops grow really fast, and they solve all sorts of problems for the price of a few beads of konpeitos. Even how they are a little wicked is seen as favorable by those who live here. I understand that it was you who generously planted these seeds."

"...well, I cannot not say that I have not, at least."

"This time it looks like we can finally put down roots in our lives. You can ask anything of us. You are truly this mansion's benefactor."

"Not at all, of late I have been neglecting you..."

With not much experience of becoming a benefactor I became flustered.

"You have even people who worship you, calling you a demon queen or a witch."

"Please stop them. That kind of words tend to leave problems behind."

"Coming from us, those are words of supreme praise."

"They are only and merely problematic. To phrase it curtly."

"As the Head Witch of Dismaland, would you like a portrait of yourself to be installed in the entrance hall?"

Ahhh, a portrait... of myself, right next to the portrait that cries blood. Sure, sure.

"I continue to say that this would be a problem for me."

"Don't say that now, come and experience it at least once..."

To run away from this heavy pushing I escaped back to the Village.

After that, Undead Mansion... Dismaland, came to be known far and wide as a famed playing spot visited by many tourists.

I supposed that tonight, too, the undead mansion's dinner table would be surrounded by smiles that would freeze one's blood (words of praise).

And the head witch of all that would be me, huh.

The portrait ended up installed in the entrance, but including how I forbade them to reveal my name, I was able to preserve my peaceful days.

At times I do get stares from passerbys, though...

And because of all that, please allow me to pray for eternal peace utilizing a charm of unknown origins taken from an ancient text that had been excavated.

Elohim, essayim. Be it God or be it demon, I implore you, preserve my peace!



## The Dragon on the Signboard

Once upon a time, in a place far, far away, specifically around the middle of the 12th century in the monastery of a land called Shrewsbury, there lived a quick-witted monk.

Hearing that he was considered quick of wit, Archduke Owen of Wales called this monk named Teatime to his castle.

The Archduke craved more land, and he thought that if he could find anything to blame the monastery with, he could make Shrewsbury his (Get Operation).

That was very mean of him.

"Ahhh, is it you, the rumored person?"

The Archduke asked that of the boy.

"So I am. Rumors, I seem to have."

Teatime answered without fear. More than fearless, he was famous for being a bit proud.

"I do have one request of you that requires your quick wit."

"Out with it, then."

"Underling, bring it."

The Archduke ordered and the underling, a grinned smile full of malice on his face, brought something with him.

The thing carried before Teatime was a signboard on top of a wheeled cart.

"Now what's this?"

On the very large signboard there was drawn a dragon with his wings spread.

"This dragon comes out of the signboard every night."

No matter how much fairies were to play about, the drawing on a signboard would not come alive and leave... well, that wasn't certain, however, let's proceed on the premise that normally a drawing didn't leap out from where it was drawn.

"You kidding me?"

"Kidding I'm not. It's the truth."

In this age, dragons were considered the mightiest of beings.

And one of those, every night, would leave the signboard it was drawn on and make a mess, this wasn't acceptable. ...but only if what the Archduke was saying was true.

"An' so, do something. If you don't, then we shall have invasion."

"Aye aye."

The Archduke intimated an invasion, but Teatime promised he would do something without seeming particularly worried. After all, and all else aside, he was confident in his quick wit.

Thought about calmly, this was clearly a trap laid by the Archduke. He wanted to make Teatime fail on purpose, pick a fight, and invade the land.

Teatime was actually in a big pinch.

"Well then, well then, quickly now."

Teatime sat where he was and slipped into deep meditation for a time. He always did it to focus his wits.

One minute had to have passed, then Teatime opened his eyes wide.

"Ding! I have a solution!"

"Do you have a good plan?"

"It'll be solved in a flash!"

Teatime beat his own chest. In doing so he quickly began preparing on taking on the dragon. He dressed in a chainmail armor made of fine beads, wore a very very hard sea turtle

eggshell as a helmet, and took the stance of a lance with a high-quality net for capturing insects as crafted by a weapon specialist.

"Come now, Duke<sup>2</sup>."

Fully prepared, Teatime said this without missing a beat.

"Could you make the dragon come out of the signboard?"

".....what?"

The Archduke was at a loss for words.

To capture the dragon on the signboard it must first be chased out of that signboard, to say it.

If he couldn't do that, well, the implication was that it was all a big fat lie.

What marvelous and sharp wit!

Insisting that a dragon that would never ever come out would have to come out, the trick the Archduke used to put Teatime to the test would be now utterly crushed!

"What... make the dragon... come out of the signboard? Me?"

"Yessah."

Pressured, the Archduke stood before the signboard.

With things like this, the trick he used was revealed. All that remained was to lavish praise on Teatime's wits for showing the true nature of the Archduke, give him his prize, and recognize that there was no way for the Duke to save face. But as it happened,

"Okay!"

".....what?"

Now it was Teatime's turn to be taken aback in surprise.

The Archduke struck with a bang the back of the signboard.

"Knights! A dragon has appeared!"

How unbelievable. The drawn dragon boom and flew out of the signboard.

This was on a level that could not be summarized as a legend, this was a dragon that was not playing around but had a real presence. He was not a pretend-play of fairy-tales, dull and boring, but something that would appear in a Western fantasy novel.

"Rooooar! Today there's lots that tastes delicious! Are fairies on bargain sale? I'm gonna dig iiin!"

"Gyah'PIIIIIIIII!!!"

The dragon really rampaged.

The fairies among the audience ran pell-mell.

And he had about seventeen of them as food.

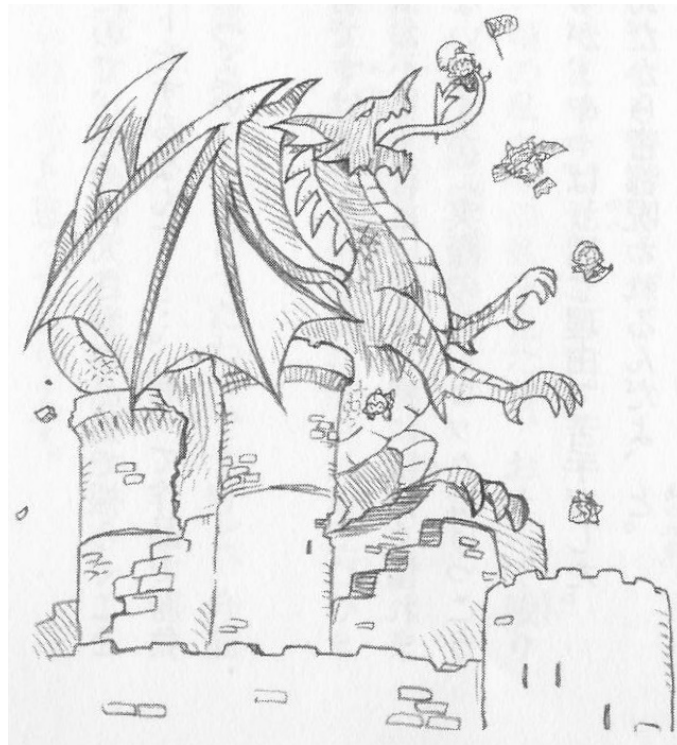
Well, he was a real dragon. He was on the dot as he ate them.

Fortunately, the seventeen eaten included Teatime and the Archduke, so the evil invasion that had been planned was off the tables.

And they all lived scattered about but happily ever after.

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<sup>2</sup> This and a couple more used 'king' to refer to the Archduke, assuming missed edits.



## Afterword

I've been bad at writing afterwords ever since I was young.

As I wanted to be a writer and deified the professionals, I felt hurt when I saw that greatness shake in things beyond their works. Seriously, commenting on a writing outside of the work itself... one should just shut up and play the game via the writing itself, seriously, not going off with the this and the that outside of the work. It's hard.

...and those are my impressions, I think those who can understand have understood.

I know, it's acting the contrarian. Still am mostly nice on that, though.

I understand I'm in the minority. Regardless I strongly aspire to a life that puts action before words. A man among men, a Captain Harlock, wouldn't I be? (Though Harlock actually talked a lot.)

Among writers there's those who manage to appear on TV broadcasts, but of course, and for the same reasons, I'm no good with that.

Ain't happening, Hiroshi, that's what I'm thinking. That there, it's a curse on our Imperial Capital.

And a contrarian like that became a pro writer, so in the beginning there was friction with those above.

It went,

"Let yourself be interviewed and spill out the secrets of your work." "Gimme a break..."

and,

"How 'bout a luncheon with the fans." "Do you want a writer to become a comedian?"

and,

"People here all want you to carry your weight, read between the lines!" "Being told to carry my weight isn't exactly praise..."

Awww so irritating.

This happened many times. Every time I rounded up into myself like a glass shard softened by water currents, its sharpness shaved. Guess I can say I've been spoiled.

Annd so here I am, writing this afterwords with peaceful feelings. I feel sooo good.

This time I've also written on the subject of future people, but if my younger self were to see my present self, I suspect he'd punch me. "You ain't me!," he would shout, of course.

And I myself wouldn't even try to dodge that punch. Youthful wrath I would take without a word. That lack of reaction would be one of the forms of protest allowed towards my uncouth present self that managed to write an Afterword without any problems.

...and with all that I can fill quickly two pages of Afterword in a short time, still I would be happy so long as you enjoyed this collection of short stories.

My next work is expected to be a completely new one and be on sale next year on February. I believe it will be a work of juvenile SF with a fairly straightforward story (that even middle-schoolers can read without issues).

I would be glad to see you over there as well.

*This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.*